

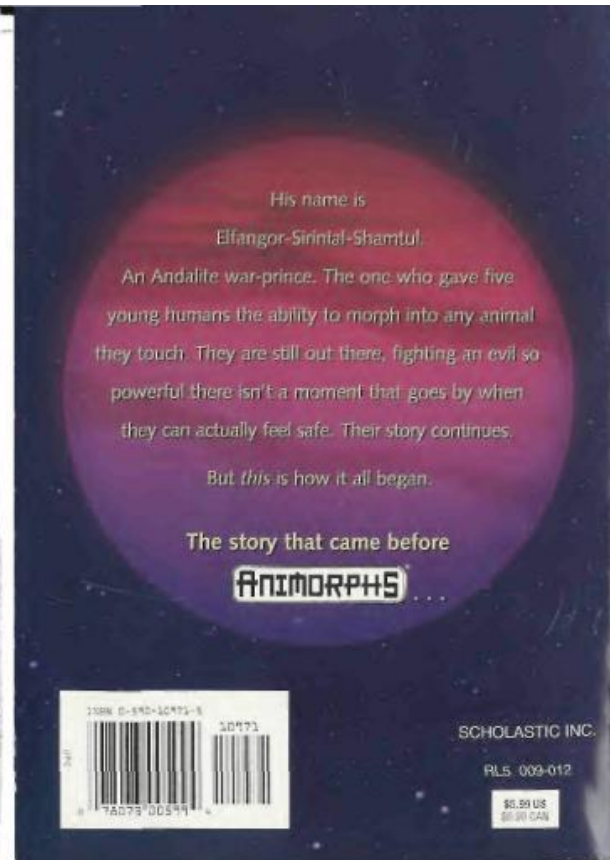
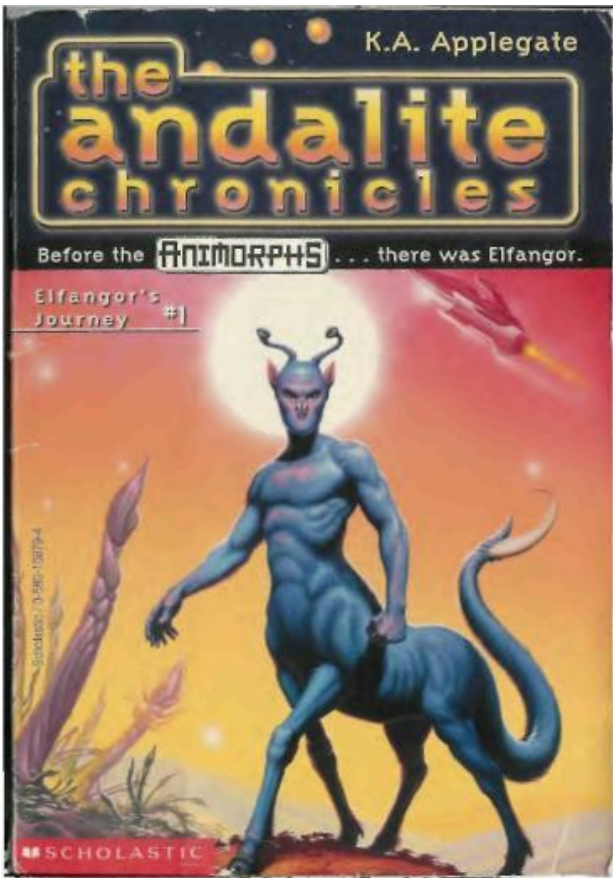
K.A. Applegate

the andalite chronicles

Before the **ANIMORPHS** . . . there was Elfangor.



SCHOLASTIC



the andalite chronicles

Elfangor's Journey

For Jean Feiwel

And, as always, for Michael

Prologue

My name is Elfangor.

I am an Andalite prince. And I am about to die. My fighter is damaged. I have crash-landed on the surface of the planet called Earth. I believe that my great Dome ship has been destroyed. I fear that my little brother Aximili is already dead.

We did not expect the Yeerks to be here in such force. We made a mistake. We underestimated the Yeerks. Not for the first time. We would have defeated their Pool ship and its fighters. But there was a Blade ship in orbit as well.

The Blade ship of Visser Three.

Two Yeerk Bug fighters are landing on either side of me now. The abomination Visser Three is here as well. I can feel him. I can sense his evil. I cannot defeat the visser in one-on-one combat. I am weak from my injuries. Too weak to morph. Too weak to fight.

This is my *hirac delest* — my final statement. I have formed the mental link to the thought-speak transponder in my fighter's computer. I will record ix

my memories before the Yeerks annihilate all trace to resist. The human race cannot fall to the Yeerks of me..

the way the Hork-Bajir race did.

If this message someday reaches the Andalite I have given the morphing power to five young world, I want the truth to be known. I am called a humans. Children, really. But sometimes children great warrior. A hero. But there is a great deal that can accomplish amazing things.

no Andalite knows about me. I have not lied, but I I have no choice but to hope. Because it was I have kept the truth a secret.

who created Visser Three. I who caused the abomiThis is not my first visit to Earth. I spent many nation. I cannot go peacefully to my death, knowyears on Earth . . . and yet, no time at all. ing that I created the creature who will enslave the I landed here now in this construction site behuman race. cause I was looking for a great weapon: the Time I came to this place, this empty construction site, Matrix. The existence of this weapon is also a secret. looking for the weapon I know is hidden here. But So many secrets in my life . . . mistakes. Things I there is no time now. No time . . .

should have done. All the strands of my strange life The visser is here. He is laughing at my weakseem to be coming together. It all seems inevitable ness. He is savoring his victory over me.

now. Of course my death would come on Earth. Of This is the *hirac delest* of Elfangor-Sirinial-Shamcourse the child would be here. Of course it would tul, Andalite prince. I open my mind in the ritual of be Visser Three who would take my life.

death. I open my mind and let all my memories —

I am too weak to locate the Time ship now. I will all my secrets — go to be recorded by the computer. die here. But I have left a legacy. Visser Three thinks This is not just a message to my own people. I he has won our long, private war. But I've left a little hope that someday humans will read it as well. Besurprise behind. cause humans are also my people. Loren . . . and I have given the morphing power to five human the boy I have just met, but not for the first youths.

t i m e . . .

I know that in doing this I have broken Andalite law. I know that this action will be condemned by all my people. But the Yeerks are here on Earth. Visser Three is here. The humans must be given a chance x

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chapter 1

T w e n t y - o n e y e a r s b e f o r e The Yeerks were loose. Like some terrifying disease, they spread their evil from planet to planet. They took species after species. They crushed all resistance. Their spiderlike Pool ships roamed throughout the galaxy. Their armies of Taxxons and Hork-Bajir, all under the control of Yeerk slugs, rampaged —

killing, butchering, enslaving.

They were annihilating entire planets.

Only we Andalites stood against them. But we had been caught off-guard. Our mighty Dome

ships, each more than a match for anything the Yeerks had, were spread too thin. Our spies, even though they used top-secret Andalite morphing technology, were unable to penetrate Yeerk secrets. For five years our princes had fought the visserers of the Yeerk Empire. They said the war could go on for another fifty years . . . another hundred years. We were outnumbered. We had fought many

battles and lost too many of them. But arrogant as I was, I was confident that if only I could get into the sliced me up twenty different ways in less than a fight, I could make a difference.

second.

I, Elfangor, was going to become a great warrior, Maybe. Sometimes I thought I'd be faster and a prince, a hero.

better if it was a real battle, not just a lesson. I was I was posted as an *aristh*, a cadet, to the Dome sure if my life depended on it, I could win. ship *StarSword*. But so far, after six months in space In any case, Sofor was not my enemy. He was looking for an elusive Yeerk task force, I had not exmy teacher. actly proven myself to be a great hero.

<Watch my eyes, not my tail,> Sofor said. <My In fact, I had proven myself to be a clumsy, slowmain eyes, you nitwit, not my stalk eyes! Keep your witted, and quite possibly hopeless fool. At least, main eyes on mine, your stalk eyes on my tail.> according to my instructors.

I watched his main eyes, but it wasn't easy. His

<*Aristh* Elfangor! How many times do I have to left eye had a huge scar running right beneath it. I tell you: The killing blow should be as graceful as it tried to focus all my thoughts down to nothingness, is fast!> Sofor yelled his thought-speak loudly just like Sofor had taught me.

enough that half the ship probably heard him.

<Your mind will never know when it is time to I stood facing him, trying to stand light and easy strike. Only your *instinct* can guide you,> he reon my four hooves, just like I was supposed to. At minded me.

the same time I had to think about where my Suddenly . . . FWAPPP!

weight was centered, and whether the tilt of my upI fired the muscles in my tail! The bladed tip per body signaled when I was going to strike, and cracked the air, it moved so fast. I could barely see whether the grass floor under my hooves was unmy own tail as it struck. even, and whether my hands were out of the way, The blade arched over my head toward Sofor's and about a million other things a warrior should face, and I thought, *Hey, maybe old Sofar will end* know for tail-fighting.

up with a new scar. If I landed a blow on Sofor, I'd Sofor was bigger than me. He was a full warrior, be a hero with every poor *aristh* who had ever sufwhile I was just a lowly *aristh* — a warrior-cadet. If fered under him.

this had been an actual battle, Sofor would have Then . . . SWOOP! FWAPP! FWAPP! FWAPP!

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Sofor blocked my tail blade with his tail, turned it I shook my head. What was I doing, getting

aside, and in about a tenth of a second delivered smart with Sofor? What was the matter with me?

three lightning blows. One to each side of my head, Was I insane?

and a third that left his razor-sharp tail blade pressed

<I got this scar from my own teacher. He wasn't right up against my throat. The blows stopped just a as sweet and understanding as I am. He didn't like hair from cutting my skin.

uppity *arisths*.>

If Sofor so much as twitched, he could remove The old warrior laughed at his own wit, turned my head from my shoulders.

away, and went galloping off across the grass,

<Not bad, *Aristh* Elfangor,> Sofor said with a holding his tail as high as an Andalite half his age laugh. <Not bad at all. That strike of yours could alwould. most have hit me . . . if I were asleep!> I breathed a huge sigh of relief. I looked around He laughed again and pulled his tail away. <Rethe dome to see whether anyone else was watching member, don't think about it, do it. You're too Intelme be humiliated. The dome of a Dome ship is a cirlectual. You think too much. You should be a cular area about a third of a mile across. It is filled scientist, not a warrior. There's no time for thought with grass, trees, ground rushes, and flowers. There in a fight. There is only time for your training to join is a lake in the middle and a stream that runs around with your instinct.>

the circumference.

<I guess even you must have forgotten that It's as much like home as it can be. You'd almost once,> I muttered.

think you were running across any well-kept area I regretted the words the instant they were out on the home world. But when you look up, you see of my head.

that you are in space, protected only by a clear plasSofor turned his stalk eyes toward me. He had a tic bubble, a dome.

dangerous expression. <What did you say, *Aristh*?> I saw other warriors off running across the grass,

<Nothing . . . just . . . urn, nothing,> I stamfeeding and playing and practicing their skills. But mered. But I was staring at the scar below his eye none seemed to be watching me.

the whole time.

I replayed the fight with Sofor. How had he

<Ah, I see. You've noticed my little scar. Yes, known the exact second when I would strike? What quite a nasty cut. Know how I got it?>
had given me away?

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What was the matter with me? Was I actually

<This is a Dome ship, not a play field,> I said. mad because Sofor was faster than me? Of *course* Arbron kicked lightly at the grass with one hoof he was a better fighter than me. He'd been in more in a gesture of contempt. Then he said the insult battles than I could imagine.

that went with the gesture. <Elfangor, when are you But it still made me angry. I didn't like people going to get your hooves back on the grass and out laughing at me. And I didn't like losing.

of the air?>

Through my stalk eyes I saw someone coming

<Some of us actually care about being better up behind me. He'd been hidden by a stand of fighters. The people need us. These are evil times.> trees. I recognized him immediately, of course: ArArbron laughed. <You don't fool me. You're not bron. We were the only two *arisths*.

some mighty prince or hero. You're just another Great. More bad news. I didn't really like Arbron scared, confused *aristh* on his first big deep-space much. He was very competitive with me. And still mission. And by the way, you shift weight to your he never seemed to take anything seriously. left hind leg when you get ready to strike. That's

<Well, hello, Elfangor,> he said. <Having fun how old Sofor knew.>
with the old Yeerk-killer?>

I was getting ready to say something really

<Hello, *Aristh* Arbron,> I said, so stiffly I sounded crushing to Arbron, but just then there came an like my own father. <I don't think it's very respectful announcement. It was a direct-beamed thoughtto refer to Sofor as the old Yeerk-killer. He is a full warspeak summons. rior, after all, and our personal combat instructor.>

<*Arisths* Elfangor and Arbron to the battle Now Arbron laughed at me. <Yeah, right, Elfanbridge.> gor. Like you're so respectful. Teach me to be as rel stared at Arbron. He stared at me. We were spectful as you, *pleeeeeease*.>

both frozen in place. Our argument was totally forHe laughed again, and I was starting to get even gotten because we were both busy being shocked angrier. It was bad enough having Sofor laugh at and horrified.

me. At least he outranked me. But Arbron was just a See, it was *impossible*. Neither of us had ever lowly *aristh* like me. Lowlier, because I had four been to the battle bridge. The battle bridge was days seniority over him.

where the captain was. And the captain of a Dome 6

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chapter 2

ship is like one of the ancient gods. I mean, captains don't even look at *arisths*.

<What did we do?> Arbron asked anxiously.

<I don't know,> I moaned, <but it must have been really out of line.>

<We're in trouble. We are in definite trouble,> Arbron said.

A Dome ship is built with the dome at one end and then, far away, far back, there are the three huge engines. Zero-space engines, and you probably know how powerful those are. Connecting the dome to the engines is a long, long shaft. Inside this shaft is the place where everyone has their quarters — their private areas.

For *arisths*, the quarters are tiny. I mean, extremely tiny. If you want to turn around you have to back out into the hallway. In my quarters I have holograms of my father and mother, of course. Plus a wish-flower representing the little brother I'll be getting in a few years. The Electorate has voted to allow more children to be born since we're in a war now. They say if the war goes on for long and there are lots of battle deaths, some families may even have three and four children.

Personally, I don't think it will come to that. And even having one sibling is bad enough. Now, in addition to the morning ritual and the evening ritual, I have to do the wish-flower ritual. And you have to 8

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do the wish-flower ritual at the wish-flower, of storerooms and plasma conduits. Our hooves

course, which is in my tiny quarters. And you can clicked on the hard, rough-textured floor. A prince imagine how impossible that is!

stepped out of his quarters and I practically ran him. My entire back half sticks out into the hallway down.

and people are jostling past while I'm chanting,

<Sorry!> I yelled. <We've been called to the battle bridge!> We welcome our hopes embodied, we welcome a battle bridge!>

new branch of the tree, we welcome . . .> So on. The prince rolled his eyes and shook his head. and so on.

But he knew: When the captain calls, you don't. It's not easy being an *aristh*. Naturally, warriors waste time.

and princes get bigger quarters. And of course the As we neared the battle bridge we saw more and captain has quarters so big he can practically play more people in the hall. We weren't the only ones drifting in there.

heading there. And then I started to notice some. But the captain isn't usually in his quarters. He's fighter pilots moving off toward the fighter bays. usually on the battle bridge. That's where Arbron. You can always tell a fighter pilot. There's a and I were heading, as fast as our hooves could swagger they have. It's almost like there's a special carry us down the long central shaft.

light that seems to shine on them.

<We're dead,> I said. <There's no way the captain calls us to the bridge unless we are in huge pilot.

trouble.>

<There's going to be a battle!> Arbron said.

<Maybe it's something good,> Arbron suggested. <Yeerks!> I said. <We're going to burn some gested. <Maybe he wants to tell us we're doing well. Yeerks!> I hoped I sounded tough and fierce. in our studies.>

We barreled into the battle bridge just as the tactical officer. <Yeah. Right. Or maybe he wants our advice,> I said. <Where in a suggested sarcastically. <Captain Feyorn, the hero dark sun are those two *arisths*?>

of like a thousand space battles, probably wants the

<Right here, sir!> I said.

advice of a pair of *arisths*.>

<Here, sir!> Arbron echoed.

All the while we were running. Running past The tactical officer — the T.O. — looked at us the closed doors of various private quarters and like we might be a couple of pieces of dung stuck to 10

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his hoof. Then he turned to the captain. <Captain, star. It was an average yellow star. I glanced up at the two *arisths* are here.>

the readout above the hologram. It showed that the Of course the captain already knew we were

star had nine planets, gas giants on the outer edge, there. They say Captain Feyorn can practically see smaller planets in tighter orbit. The sixth planet was through walls. He knows everything that goes on front and center in the display. It had a rather beauaboard his ship. tiful set of rings.

He stood in the center of the room, with the T.O.

<There he is,> Prince Breeyar said. He was very on his right and Prince Breeyar, commander of all calm, but you could tell he was a predator looking at fighter squadrons, on his left.

prey.

The room was circular, with bright monitors I searched the hologram of space for a clue. glowing and computer screens reeling off data. Then I saw it: a tiny, bright point that was moving Holographic monitors created images in midair, and against the background of the ringed planet. there were sound-speech info-tags and thoughtWas it a Yeerk ship?

speech computer warnings.

<I think we have a Skrit Na raider,> the captain Warriors working on the battle bridge often said.

used hand signals between themselves so that the

<Yes, Captain,> the T.O. agreed. <He's accelertought-speak noise wouldn't become a jumble. ating. He'll be able to go to Zero-space in twenty At the front of the battle bridge was a large, minutes. Sensors show he came from the third holographic image showing the space around us. planet in this system.>

We were in normal space, not Zero-space, so the

<On-screen,> Captain Feyorn said.

background was black, filled with bright stars. Suddenly the hologram shifted and we were

<Magnify,> the T.O. said.

looking at a small planet with a single large moon. The hologram of space grew more detailed. SudThe planet was blue with swirls of white, and land denly it was as if actual stars, each as big as my fist, masses that were brown and green.

were hovering inside the battle bridge.

<What do we have on this planet?>

<Isolate the target and magnify,> the tactical of<There is a sentient species there. They have ficer said.

achieved orbital space flight and have landed Now the hologram showed just a slice of a single on their moon. Sensors show presence of nuclear 12

weapons. And we're picking up transmissions in they sometimes serve the Yeerks. So we board the various parts of the electromagnetic spectrum. All Skrit Na ship and check for any violations.> He said in all, probably a Level Six civilization. I would it perfectly. Like he had rehearsed.

recommend —>

Then he blew it. <And if they put up a fight, we The captain cut him off by raising one finger on put some tail into them!>

one hand. Then the captain turned his head and his The captain, the prince, the T.O., every warrior main eyes toward Arbron and me.

on the bridge, and I all stared at Arbron like he was He looked right at me. Right at *me*. I felt my insane. Which he obviously was. You don't say <put blood turn to sludge and my brain grind to a halt. some tail into them> to the captain! That's some<Tell me, *Aristh*, the situation: We have a Skrit thing you say in a schoolyard fight.

Na raider leaving a Level Six civilization. Twenty The captain looked at Prince Breeyar and the minutes till he's safe in Zero-space. What do you tactical officer. He shrugged. <I guess we'd better recommend?>

do what the two *arisths* say, eh? The big one looks No, this wasn't happening. The captain really like he's ready to faint. And the other one thinks he's *was* asking my advice. Clearly I was dreaming. you, Breeyar.>

<What do I recommend?> I asked, feeling the That got a laugh from everyone on the bridge. knife-edge of panic. <Um ... um, dispatch fighters

<Launch fighters,> the captain said. <Oh, and on an intercept course?>

those Skrit Na ships are so cramped inside we'd bet<Is that a question or a statement?> the captain ter send along a couple of our people who can asked.

move around in there. Now. Who do we have that's I sucked in air and tried not to faint. <Dispatch small enough to fit inside a Skrit Na freighter?> fighters for an intercept. Send two on an intercept Suddenly, I realized that everyone on the battle course, and bring two up behind on a chase vector.> bridge was looking at me and Arbron. And then I re<And you,> the captain said, turning his awful alized we were both younger and smaller than anygaze on Arbron. <What do we do when we interone else. cept? And why?>

And that's when I almost did faint.

<The Skrit Na are smugglers and renegades. And The captain was going to send us into battle. 14

chapter 3

<This is great,> I said.

<I just wish it was Yeerks, not some old Skrit Na,> Arbron said.

I closed my main eyes, leaving only my stalk eyes open. I wanted to focus. I had been trained on fighters, of course. I was pretty good as a pilot. But still, I was going to be flying alongside Prince

<Okay, who takes the helm, and who takes Breeyar in his personal squadron. Everyone in the weapons?> Arbron asked.

squadron was a great fighter pilot. And Breeyar

<I have four days of seniority over you,> I said could just about fly a fighter through a black hole coolly. <I take the helm.>

and back out again.

I could see that he wanted to argue. He wanted I deeply did not want anything to go wrong. The to fly the fighter, of course. But there was no chance thought of how humiliated I'd be if I missed a turn I was going to miss out on flying my first combat mission. No chance. And I did have seniority. or something was too awful to think about.

<Power up,> I told the ship's systems. <Prepare

<Okay,> Arbron said coldly. <You fly it. I'll shoot. for launch.>

Not that we'll be doing any shooting.>

You could feel the old fighter come alive. The The inside of a fighter is not exactly roomy. This monitors glowed. The floor hummed and vibrated was an older model, built for two, but it was still not up through my legs. I touched a screen with my finexactly big. gers and the viewport became transparent. We

<Figures they'd give us an old piece of junk could see directly out now, through an actual Model Fourteen to fly,> I said, staring at the controls window, not just a screen. Of course we were still in as if I'd never seen them before.

the fighter bay inside the Dome ship, so there wasn'

<What did you expect them to give us? A brandt anything to see. new Model Twenty-two?>

<Automatic launch sequence begins in ten secFor a second I forgot that this was my first offonds,> the prince called. <Simultaneous drop. Go to cial combat

command. I shot a glance at Arbron, burn on my mark. Acceleration standard.> and the two of us almost burst out laughing.

<Weapons powered,> Arbron told me.

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<Five seconds to launch,> the computer said. to match velocity with the other fighters. Something

<Please don't let me screw this up,> I prayed. I I should have done to start with.

thought I'd said it silently till I noticed Arbron nod<Hello, Elfangor! Hello-o. You forgot: These old ding in agreement.

Model Fourteens accelerate faster from a cold

<Two seconds,> the computer prompted. start,> Arbron pointed out.

<Hold on,> I said.

The next thing I heard in my mind was the

FWOOOOOSH!

prince. <You may want to ease back just a little, We were blown out the hatch, out into black *Aristh* Elfangor,> he said.

space. Ahead of us, four other fighters, all Model I was relieved he didn't reprimand me. But I was 22s, dropped from the bottom of the Dome ship's burning with embarrassment. There it was: my big fighter bay.

chance to look like a veteran. And I'd looked like an

<Intercept team, go to burn,> the prince said amateur.

with total calm.

I maneuvered my fighter back into formation Two of the fighters lit up their engines. With a behind the other two chase fighters.

brilliant blue glow, the two fighters flashed out of Arbron brought the Skrit Na raider up on the sight into the black of space.

holographic imager. It was very different than any I waited with my fingers just millimeters above Andalite ship. Our fighters were elongated ovals with the engine control pad. I was not going to miss my two long, cylindrical engines attached by stubby cue.

"wings" on either side. Our main weapon, or shred<Chase team, go to burn,> the prince said. der, arced overhead much like an Andalite tail. I punched the control pad and it was like we'd The Skrit Na ship was round, with tapered sides. been kicked in the back.

It looked like a fat disc. You could hardly even see

S H W W W O O O O O O O O O O O O F !

where the engines were, and the Skrit Na had blinkWe were out of there!
Out! Of! There!

ing colored lights all around it. I guess they find that Unfortunately, we had
taken off so fast we'd attractive or something.

shot right past the prince's own fighter.

<Intercept in place,> came the report from the

<Ahhhh! Oh, no! No!> I ordered the computer two intercept ships. They had
gone into a danger18

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ous Maximum Burn to get well out in front of the

<Whoa,> the prince laughed. <That woke me Skrit Na and cut off escape.
Now we just had to up. Return fire, but only if you can hit the engine sneak up
calmly behind them.

pod underneath. Repeat, aim only for the engines. Then . . .

There may be innocent creatures on that ship.>

<What the. . . Sir, there is a second Skrit Na A split second later, the prince
fired and missed. ship out here! It was hidden from sensors by the His wingman
fired and also missed.

rings of this planet. Repeat, there is a second Skrit it hadn't even occurred to
me that Arbron would Na raider.>

actually want to take the risk of shooting. But then Prince Breeyar rapped his
orders. <Okay, you he said, <So, Elfangor, how about if we just see how two on
intercept go after the *new* target. Everyone fast this old tub will accelerate?>

else, with me.>

I didn't need to be asked twice. I punched up I looked at Arbron. We both
nodded. It was getMaximum Burn, and we went to one-tenth light ting more
complicated now. We could actually have speed in about three seconds!

a fight!

<Yaaaahhh!> WHAM!

Suddenly a bright blue engine flame shot from

<Yaaaahhh!> WHAM!

the bottom of the nearer Skrit Na.

The acceleration was outrageous! The compen<He's running,> the prince
said. He sounded sators were slow and we were thrown back against calm, but
you could still tell he was excited. There the bulkhead.

isn't a fighter pilot alive who doesn't enjoy a good I fought to get back on my
feet and to the conchase. trols. I renewed my thought-speak link to the cornThe
Skrit Na ship hauled. And we hauled after puter. <Boost the compensators!>

him.

The computer adjusted and we climbed painfully. Then, to my total shock, the Skrit Na fired his to our feet. Arbron reached his weapons station and weapons!

took aim. I heard the hum of the shredder powering

<Hey, look out!> Arbron yelled.

up, followed quickly by the sound of firing. A thin beam of greenish light lanced toward the Hmmmm. TSEEEWWWW!

prince's fighter. It missed!

<Yes! Yes! Yes!> Arbron yelled.

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The shredder beam sliced through space and

<Aristh Arbron is a very qualified exo-datologist,> burned away a section of the Skrit Na's engines. The I said truthfully.

blue engine flame died instantly.

Arbron gave me a dirty look.

It was the most beautiful thing I'd seen up to

<Well, you *are*, Arbron,> I said defensively. that point in my life. But at the same time I felt a See, it's kind of a slight insult to say an *aristh* is wave of jealousy that Arbron had taken the shot good with computers. That's like a technician thing, and not me.

not a warrior thing. Even though warriors are sup<Good job,> Prince Breeyar said. <Nice flying, posed to be good at all kinds of science and art as nice shooting.>

well as fighting.

Of course he only complimented us because we

<Good,> the prince said. <And, hey, don't bang were *arisths*. I mean, for the regular pilots it would your stalks on the low ceilings over there.> have been no big deal. But who cared? Prince Bree<Yes, sir,> I replied. <No problem.> yar had said we did a good job.

I was on top of the universe. I was a hero-in<He said "good job,"> Arbron said to me. <He waiting. Practically a prince already. The war with did actually say it, right? I wasn't imagining things?> the Yeerks would be over just as soon as I could get

<The prince said "good job,"> I confirmed, relin the game. ishing the words.

I was a fool.

At that moment I just loved being alive. I even loved Arbron, as annoying as he was sometimes. This was why I'd joined the military. This was why I'd become an *aristh*. This was what it was all about.

<All right, my little *arisths*,> the prince said affectionately. <Now that you've given us all a lesson in good shooting, show us how you board an enemy ship. Don't forget to download their onboard computer. Is either one of you qualified for exodatology?> 22

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chapter 4

and kidnapping the local species. Sometimes they perform medical experiments on them. Sometimes they just fly around with them and then let them go. But often they carry local creatures away to add them to zoos on the Skrit Na home world.

Like I said: a weird species. No one understands the Skrit Na. Personally, I don't think they **I guess most people know about the Skrit Na.** understand themselves.

But in case you don't, I'll tell you what **I** know. I pulled our fighter up alongside the damaged The Skrit Na don't care what anyone else in the Skrit Na ship and turned on the tractor beam to hold galaxy thinks about them. They don't belong to the the two ships tightly together.

Yeerk Empire. They aren't one of our allies. The Skrit Na decided to make it easy. I guess They don't care about laws or customs or anything. they figured they'd made us mad enough. Skrit Na All the Skrit Na care about is collecting things are no match for Andalite power.

and owning things.

I married my hatch to the Skrit Na hatch and The Skrit Na are unusual in another way: They popped it open. I equalized gravities and marched are actually like two different races. The Skrit look as boldly as I could into the captured ship, with Arlike huge insects, almost as large as an Andalite. bron just behind me.

They have fourteen legs and six sets of antennae, There was smoke in the other ship. And there and aren't really very intelligent. But the Skrit each seemed to be storage boxes strewn here and there. eventually weave a cocoon and a year later, out of Two clumsy Skrit lumbered past, kicking through the dead Skrit there pops a Na.

the debris. The ceiling pressed low, and I had to duck my head or risk bruising my stalk eyes. A pair The Na are a whole different story. The Na have of

cocooned Skrit were more or less glued to a corfour very slender legs. Sometimes they rear up and ner of the ceiling. One looked about ready to hatch walk on just two legs, using the other legs as hands. a Na.

They have large heads shaped like Andalite heads, only they have just two huge eyes.

There were three Na that I could see. The Na Skrit Na are constantly going to peaceful planets captain was pressed back against his command con24

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sole. He looked scared. But not of me. He was glarmaking the sounds with its mouth. It turned the ing angrily at a bizarre creature that had a Skrit Na Dracon beam on me. "One move and I pull the trighand weapon, a modified Yeerk Dracon beam, ger. I don't know what this gun will do, but I'm willpointed at the Na captain. ing to bet you won't like it."

The bizarre creature stood just a bit shorter than Of course, at that point all I heard was gibberish me. And what was incredible was that it stood on sounds. The translator chip, which all members of just two legs.

the Andalite military have implanted in their heads, Just two. It had arms, but you could see that it requires a few minutes to begin to understand new didn't use them to walk. They wouldn't have been languages. Some languages it never does get right. long enough.

Fortunately, almost all species can understand our The creature's face was the same size as mine, thought-speak since it works at a level beyond mere but rounder. There were two small bluish eyes on words.

the front of its face. And the lower third of the face

"Be careful, Andalite friend," the Na captain was split open horizontally.

said. "They are savage, violent beings. Crazy! Wild!

Many species have such openings. They're

Oh, yes! This female is a vicious beast! Better to kill called mouths.

her! Or even better, let us cage her again. Yes, yes, Its body had no fur, but did have brightly

that would be best. As soon as you mistakenly fired colored skin that seemed to hang loosely in some on us., she sprang up and grabbed my weapon. Wild areas. Its upper body was covered in loose, almost and dangerous, oh, yes!"

billowy, white skin with tiny pastel patterns. Its two The translator chip handled the Na language legs were covered in a rough-textured blue skin that easily. I didn't bother to answer the Na. Everyone stopped suddenly at its hooves. The hooves were knows Skrit Na will lie to anyone about anything. white and adorned with what looked like thick The Na captain winked one of his big eyes at me. threads or cables laced together.

As if he and I were on the same side. His fellow Na But what caught my eye was the hair that

officers all looked scared. The Skrit went on with sprouted from its head. It was long and wavy and as their simple duties like nothing was happening. gold as a yellow sun.

To be honest with you, I didn't know what to do.

"Freeze, horse-boy," this bizarre creature said, I was as confused as the Skrit Na.

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The only one who seemed to have a clue was shows you that these Martian jerks aren't all that the bizarre two-legged creature herself.

tough. He's in the back, knocked out. The other

<Talk to her,> Arbron suggested. <Use your guy, I mean. But I grabbed this gun away from charm, Elfangor.>

Twinkle there." She jerked her head in the direction

<Urn . . . whoever you are . . . whatever you are, of the Na captain.

don't fire that weapon. Put it down.>

The translator chip had no translation for the

"Yeah, right. Hey. Hey, wait a minute! I can hear word "twinkie." Evidently "twinkie" was some kind you in my head, but you're not really talking." of word for "alien."

Suddenly the translator chip had heard enough.

<Well, we don't mean you any harm,> I said as It began providing instantaneous translation. I could calmly as I could. <How about this idea? You can understand her.

keep the Dracon beam, just don't point it at any<I am in charge here,> I said firmly. <Drop the one.>

weapon!>

The female looked at the weapon. "It's called a

"Uh-uh. Nope. I don't think so, horse-boy. I'm Dracon beam, huh? What's it do?"

tired of being kidnapped and dragged off by giant Arbron answered before I could suggest he shut cockroaches and little green men from Mars." up. <It fires an energy beam which causes an ex<Excuse me, but we are here to rescue you,> Arceedingly painful death. Which is why we'd really bron said.

prefer it if you didn't fire it.>

<Exactly. What these Skrit Na have done to you

"Oh. A phaser. Like on that old Star Trek show. I is wrong. That's why we captured this ship.> can't believe they took that off the air. Now it's just I spoke like I would to a child. Obviously, this on reruns."

species was primitive. They didn't even have tails. I had nothing to say to that because I had no

<What little green men?> Arbron asked. <They idea what she was talking about. I looked to Arbron. aren't green. The Na are gray.>

He shook his head. No, he didn't understand, either. The female narrowed her already narrow eyes. Translator chips have limits.

The Dracon beam in her hand wavered. "I'd already

<If you come with us, we'll treat you well. And captured this ship before you two came along. Me we will return you to your home planet.> and the other guy. And we're both just kids, which

"Earth?"

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<Is that the name of the third planet in this sys<So do I. But I guess we have very different tem?>

dreams.>

"Yeah."

Then Loren smiled. It's a thing humans do by turn<And are you an Earther?> ing the corners of their mouths upward. "Maybe,"

"Human. That's what we are: humans. Me and she said. "Maybe not." the other guy."

<And we are Andalites. My name is Elfangor. This is Arbron.>

Arbron had gone over to the nearest Skrit Na control panel. He was downloading a copy of all their computer files as Prince Breeyar had ordered. It's standard procedure whenever you board an alien craft.

"You look like centaurs, only with scorpion tails. And the extra eyeballs up on top of your heads . . ." She seemed to hesitate. Suddenly she turned the Dracon beam around and handed it to me, handle first.

<Thank you,> I said. I reached to take the Dracon beam from her and my fingers brushed hers. For some reason I looked at her long golden hair.

"My name is Loren," she said. "This is all kind of amazing. Most humans don't even believe in aliens. But, well, here you are. Real and all. Unless I'm dreaming."

<Do humans dream?> I asked her, surprised. " I do. Every night."

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chapter 5

the second human woke up. We'd left the Skrit Na to try to figure out how to fix their ship. That was their problem.

Hey, no one told them to shoot at us. Right? " Unh," the human moaned.

He was larger than Loren. Maybe two or three inches larger. His hair was brown, not golden, and it We led Loren over to our fighter, and then we was cut short. His eyes were also brown, not blue carried the second human across. He was unconlike Loren's. scious. Bright red blood ran from a cut above his left Loren went to him and bent her legs in such a eye.

way that she could kneel down beside him. Arbron

<Red blood?> Arbron said. <Red? Yuck.> and I exchanged a look of amazement. It had to be I was trying to act more mature than Arbron, but hard to kneel like that and not fall.

to tell you the truth, blood that color creeped me

"Hey, kid, you okay?" Loren asked. out, too. Still, I didn't think humans looked ugly or The wounded human opened his eyes and

anything. Not like the Skrit or Taxxons, which are blinked. He stared hard at me. "What happened?" seriously ugly species. Nor did they look dangerous, Loren shrugged. "Now we have a different like the Hork-Bajir.

bunch of aliens. Who'da guessed there were so Mostly they looked funny. I'd never seen a

many people zipping around outer space? Are you species that walked on just two legs without even okay? That big cockroach popped you pretty good a tail to help with balance. Arbron said what I back there."

was thinking. <All it would take is one little push and they'd fall right over. Earth must be hysteri<You have nothing to fear,> I said gently. <You cal! Humans falling forward and back, falling all are safe now.>

over the place. No wonder they are so primitive. The human felt his wound and looked at the red They probably spend all their time just trying to blood. He seemed almost as grossed out as I was. stand up.>

But he climbed to his feet. Which involved using his hands, noticed. Humans seem to have stronger We were almost back to the Dome ship when hands than we have.

<I am Elfangor. This is Arbron. We are Andalites. to watch. He clenched his jaw tightly. "And now it We will return you to your home planet.> seems your heroics were pointless. We're prisoners The human nodded slowly. "Telepathy. You use again. And I have a feeling we won't be grabbing telepathy to talk." His gaze traveled to my stalk guns away from these Andalites."

eyes, back to my face, then to my tail. "That tail is a Suddenly, he lunged forward toward the Dracon weapon, isn't it? Is it poisonous or does it just cut?" beam in my hand! Without even thinking, I

I decided right then that I didn't like this human whipped my tail forward and pressed the blade as much as Loren. I didn't like him much at all. <I against Chapman's throat.

politely told you my name, human,> I said coldly. Chapman laughed. "See that? See how fast he

<Now, I require *your* name.>

was? Couldn't even see that tail move." Again he The human gave me a look that seemed insogave me an insolent look. "What did you say your lent. Although who can really tell what an alien faspecies is called? Andalites? Well, I have a feeling cial expression means?

you guys are a little more dangerous than you

"My name is Hedrick, actually. But I prefer my pretend to be, despite all your polite talk and last name. Most people call me by my last name: promises." Chapman."

I felt like a fool. Not for the first time that day.

"I think these Andalites are okay," Loren said to The human Chapman had been testing me.

Chapman. "At least they're better-looking than the

<We need to prepare to dock with the Dome last bunch. And they've promised to —" ship,> Arbron reminded me.

"Shut up," Chapman snapped. "I'm not interI went through the docking procedure, moving ested in the opinion of a kid."

the fighter back inside the fighter bay. I concen"Kid? Hey, you big jerk, who was it that got the trated on my work, but I was upset. I didn't like the weapon after the ship stopped moving? *Me*. And human named Chapman. I didn't like his suspicion who was it that was cringing in the back, begging toward me. After all, we had rescued him from a fufor mercy? You. And anyway, I'd be surprised if ture as a zoo animal on the Skrit Na home world. He you're even a year older than me."

should be grateful.

Chapman's face grew pink. A fascinating thing But maybe that's the way humans are. I've heard 34

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chapter 6

there are species that can't handle anyone helping them. They'd rather die than ever be in debt to someone.

But judging by Loren, not all humans were that way.

Not your problem, Elfangor, I told myself. Just turn the humans over to the captain. Not your problem at all.

<Okay, this part is a little tricky,> I told Loren But I was wrong. The humans *were* my problem. **and Chapman.** We were moving from the central In fact, I was about to have lots of problems. shaft out onto the dome floor. There's a ninety-degree gravity change at that point. I mean, "down" in the main shaft is a different direction from

"down" on the dome floor. It's confusing at first. We were safely aboard the *StarSword* and Arbron and I were giving the humans a brief tour. The debriefing officers were too busy to see us yet, I guess, and we couldn't figure out what else to do with the humans.

<You just walk naturally along the curving floor,> I explained. <I know it looks like you're walking off the edge of a cliff, but the artificial gravity will move with you.>

Arbron and I held our breath, watching the ungainly two-legged creatures trying to stay upright. Amazingly, they did it.

<They have very excellent balance,> Arbron whispered.

<They'd have to.>

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We emerged from the shaft out onto the grass even you have to admit *that* would be funny to of the dome and Loren cried out.
see.>

"It's huge! It's like a whole park in here! Trees. Chapman started to explain how humans ate

Grass. Flowers. Wow."

but it was hard to picture, really. It involved spearing

<You have these kinds of things on your planet?> chunks of hot, dead animals and stuffing them in I asked her.

the mouth. But I refused to believe that was really

"Well, similar. Our trees are almost always how they ate. I assumed Chapman was making

green. And the grass is all green, too. More green things up. Later I found out the truth.

than this, I mean, not so much blue. And no red." In any case, I was relieved when Loren inter<If you are hungry, please feel free to eat as rupted Chapman's gruesome story to ask, "Do you much as you like,> I suggested.

mind if I take my shoes off? We've been cooped up

"Eat what?" Chapman asked.

in that Skritchey Nose flying saucer. It'd be nice to I waved my arm widely to indicate the entire walk on the grass."

Of course, I had no objection because I had no dome. <We have seventeen species of grass in thirty idea what a "shoe" was. And I could certainly idendifferent flavors.> tify with the idea of running on the grass. I was hun"Grass? You eat grass?" Loren asked. gry, too.

Chapman nodded thoughtfully. "That's why you But then Loren sat down on the grass and began have the dome, isn't it? You graze. Like horses or ripping her hooves off! Ripping the very hooves cows. Only you don't have mouths. So how do you from her legs!

eat?"

<What are you doing!> I cried. <Stop that! Stop!

<Wait a minute, you eat with your mouths?> Why are you hurting yourself?

>

Arbron asked.

"What? What are you yelling about?"

"How else are you going to eat?" Chapman

<You're going to hurt yourself, and I don't think said.

our doctors know how to help humans,> I said.

<With your hooves, like any sensible creature,> Loren stared at me. She was still holding her leg Arbron said. Then he laughed. <Do you mean that awkwardly in her two hands. Then she laughed out on Earth humans walk around pressing their mouths loud.

to the ground to eat?> He looked at me. <Okay, 38

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It was an alarming, yet strangely pleasing, sound. turned her head around. She turned the entire thing

"These aren't hooves, Elfangor," she said. so it was pointing backward.
"Come on!"

"They're shoes. See?" She untied the tiny ropes and But I couldn't move. I noticed Arbron was as before I could stop her, she ripped the white hoof amazed as I was.

clear off!

<What the . . . what's she doing?> he asked.

<N0000!> I moaned.

Then it dawned on him. <It's because they only

<Ahhhh!> Arbron yelled.

have two eyes! They turn their heads around to see But Loren was not in pain. And there was no behind them!>

blood. Then she removed a layer of white skin from I stifled an urge to laugh. I broke into a gentle the exposed leg end. Suddenly, I was staring at five trot and quickly caught up to Loren.

tiny pink fingers. They were growing from her leg.

"Feels ... good ... to stretch ... my muscles,"

"See? This is my foot. We don't have hooves. she said, speaking in a halting way as she ran. And we wear shoes over our feet. See? They keep She stopped running and twirled around. Twirled the rocks or whatever from hurting our feet." right around, and her golden hair flew out behind I felt a wave of intense pity. What had gone her. That was something to see. A two-legged creawrong in the evolution of this species? The entire ture can twirl better than a normal person. species had to cover its "feet" to keep from being

"I was sure I was going to die on that flying injured? An entire race crippled? saucer," she said. "But here I am! Amazing." <I Suddenly the funny mental image of a planet of guess this all seems very strange.>

humans falling over all the time was replaced by the

"Oh, yeah. Strange isn't half of it. This is a beausad picture of a species of cripples, hobbling along tiful tree. Pink leaves. Incredible."

on their weak, injured "feet" and covering them

<It's called a therant tree. It's in its creast phase. with artificial hooves.

Do you see the way the grasses become more gelaLoren stood up on her delicate pink feet with sic and less escalic as they grow near? That is because —> their ridiculous, short pink fingers and started to run across the grass. She wasn't very fast, but she I stopped talking then, because Loren casually obviously wasn't crippled.

reached up and touched a low branch. There was And then she did something amazing. She

nothing wrong with that, of course. But then she 40

wrapped both her hands around the branch and Earth are very cold. Parts of it are so cold you'd die lifted herself clear up off the ground!

without many layers of clothing."

That alone was a miracle. But as she stretched, I

<But why do you live in those places?> I asked. saw the white, pastel-marked skin of her upper Chapman smiled. It was interesting, because albody come loose! It lifted away and revealed a layer ready I was getting the feeling that not all human of pinkish, tan underneath that matched her face smiles were pleasant. "We're not going to be kept and arm skin.

out of a place just because the weather's bad. We Arbron came running, with Chapman struggling adapt. We grab whatever's available and make the to catch up.

best of it. At least that's my motto: Grab what you Loren held herself suspended and laughed at us. can."

I guess we'd been staring.

I would have asked him more, but just then the

<Very strong arms!> Arbron remarked. <Can call came for Arbron to go to debriefing. And I was you imagine lifting your whole body up with your ordered to take the humans to a holding room. arms?>

<That skin is very strange,> I said. <It's almost as if it's not attached.>

Loren let herself drop back to the grass. And she didn't even fall over.

"It's not skin," Chapman said. "It's called clothing. Like the artificial hooves? This is artificial skin. It keeps us warm."

<You're cold?>

"No. But that's why we have clothing. To keep us warm in cold places."

<Why would you be in cold places?> I asked, curiosity overcoming my dislike for the human. He shrugged his powerful human shoulders.

Shoulders capable of lifting his entire body. "Parts of 43

chapter 7

<Well, forget it. Come on. We move out immediately. We're supposed to meet up with our commander for this mission.> Something about the tone of

Arbron's thoughtspeak made me wary. <Our commander? Who's our commander?>

<None other than War-prince Alloran-Semitur<**What? WHAT? Leave the ship?!> I screeched.** Corraass,> Arbron said.

<What do you mean, leave the ship?!>

Both my hearts sank into my hooves. Alloran. AlArbron did not look any happier than I was. Ioran, the disgraced. So this mission was definitely

<They just *told* me, okay? They didn't ask my not a reward from the captain. Alloran had once opinion. The captain called me from debriefing, been a great warrior and prince. But he had been had me run to the bridge, said, "You and *Aristh* disgraced. I didn't know why. No one talked about Elfangor be at Docking Bay Seven in ten minutes," it. Everyone just knew that Alloran had broken some and I said, "Yes, sir.">

law or custom.

I had taken the humans to a holding, room. And Being sent off on some stupid side mission with a then, while waiting for my own debriefing I'd gone disgraced war-prince was not a good thing.

back to the dome to eat. I was very hungry. I was on I couldn't believe it. This ship was my home. I my way to check back on Loren when Arbron interdidn't want to leave her, not even for a while. It cepted me.

could take a long time before we could rejoin the

<This can't be right,> I moaned. <The *StarSword StarSword*, and by then, who knew? Maybe by is my home. We're going to find that Yeerk task some miracle the entire war would be over.

force and destroy them.>

Which would be good, I supposed.

<Yeah, yeah, I know. And you'll be a big hero

<What's in Docking Bay Seven, anyway?> I and they'll make you a prince without even slowing grumbled as we reached the right door.

down to make you a warrior.>

Arbron swung his stalks back and forth in a

<That's not what I was thinking,> I lied.

"who knows?" gesture.

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We opened the door to Docking Bay Seven. And

<Prince Alloran, what is our mission?> Arbron there, standing awkwardly on their two legs, were asked.

Loren and Chapman. Behind them stood Alloran. The prince sighed a little, but when he spoke he I had seen War-prince Alloran around the Dome was firm

and correct. <We are to take these two ship at times. He'd always seemed to be deep in aliens back to their planet, erase their recent memothought. Like he was off somewhere in his imaginaries, and rejoin the StarSword whenever we can.> tion or memory. He was not especially large. But he

<Transport work,> I said. I didn't exactly sneer, seemed to be carved from solid steel. Even his fur but I felt like sneering. We were just running a silly was a metallic blue. And the bare flesh of his upper errand.

body showed faint traces of burn scars.

"Excuse me? Erase my memory?" Loren said. Beyond Alloran was a ship I had never seen be "No one is erasing my memory." fore. It hovered just inches above the polished floor.

<It's necessary,> I said as kindly as I could. <Your It was three times the size of any fighter I'd ever encivilization is not ready for what you've countered. The main section was a fantastically encountered. If you go back to your Earth, you'll elongated oval that stretched way out in front of have to have all memory of this erased.> three oversized, swept-back engines. Three engines, The two humans looked at each other. The one not the usual t w o ! And coming up overhead called Chapman made a snorting sound from his was the long, gracefully arced spike of the main nose. Loren made a facial expression that looked shredder.

troubled. At least that's how it looked to me. Oh, she was a thing of beauty. I had never fallen

<Let's move, arisths,> Alloran ordered. <Load in love with a machine before, but, oh, that ship was the aliens. The captain wants to go to Z-space five sweet.

minutes from now, and by then we have to be well

<I see you like my little toy, aristh,> Alloran said. clear of the Dome ship. Your personal belongings

<It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen,> I have already been brought from your quarters.> said. <Like . . . like a work of art.> No one was in a good mood as we walked up

<I designed her myself. I call her the Jahar. It's the ramp into the Jahar. The humans were stonemy wife's name.> faced, angry, perhaps afraid. Arbron and I were 46

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both grim, feeling we'd been shoved off on some fast. It involves tunneling through anti-space, what stupid side trip. And Alloran could not have been we call Zero-space, and then back into the normal exactly thrilled, either. He was a great war-prince. universe at another point,> Arbron said. And here he was running errands with only a pair of

"But I suppose you Andalites keep the secret to *arisths* under his command.

yourselves, eh?" Chapman said.

The one good thing was the *Jahar*. It was as

<Not always,> Alloran said darkly. <Once we beautiful inside as out. There were small but luxurishared it. The result was the Yeerk Empire that ous quarters. And there was good green and blue threatens all decent species. Be glad you are safe on grass under our feet, not hard steel. By some trick of your simple planet, alien. The galaxy is not a happy gravity manipulation Alloran had even created a place to be anymore.>

small waterfall in one corner that went down, Alloran entered the destination into the comsplashed into a pool, then fell back upward to fall all puter. We would make one brief Zero-space jump to over again.

approach Earth. But Z-drive travel is not very preAlloran took the helm, which left Arbron and me cise. Even if we were lucky, we'd probably emerge a with nothing to do. He executed a smooth launch million miles from Earth itself. It would be a trip of out of the docking bay, and then, suddenly, we many days to get there.

were out in black space, looking up through the real

<Make the aliens comfortable, *arisths*,> Alloran windows at the Dome ship. ordered.

The *StarSword* was silhouetted against the

<Prince, afterward may I use your ship's combright rings of the sixth planet. puters?> Arbron asked. <I have a copy of the Skrit

"Oh, my God," Loren gasped. "That's Saturn!" Na download and I thought I spotted something As I watched, the *StarSword's* engines glowed strange.>

brilliant blue and the Dome ship picked up speed.

<An exo-datologist, eh?> Alloran said with a Faster and faster, till suddenly, with a flash, she slight sneer. <The new ideal: warrior, scientist, artist. translated into Zero-space and disappeared. It's not enough to be a fighter anymore, eh? They.

"Faster-than-light travel?" Chapman marveled. "It'

want a gentler, more balanced, more intellectual s physically impossible!" sort of warrior nowadays.>

<True. But Z-space travel doesn't involve going Arbron looked helplessly at me. <I guess so, 48

chapter 8

War-prince Alloran. I mean, that's what they teach us, anyway.>

For a while Alloran said nothing. He just stared blankly, not at anyone. Or at least not at anyone in that room. <The Electorate wants war without slaughter. They want a clean, neat, honorable war. Fools.>

I was shocked. You didn't call the Electorate **It was a long, boring trip.** We came out of Zerofools. You just didn't. space halfway between the orbits of Earth and a

<Sir . ,> Arbron asked timidly. <The complanet Loren called Mars. puter . . . ?>

We had to travel through conventional space.

<What? Oh, yes. The computer. Why not? Use And we had to keep our speed down so as not to it all you like,> the prince said. <We're in for a long, distort time too much. If we'd gone to Maximum boring ride.>

Burn all the way to Earth, we'd have gotten there in a few hours. But on the planet, years would have passed. That's relativity for you.

I had little to do. Alloran brooded alone at the helm, or else went to his quarters. And Arbron seemed to have found some project to keep him busy. He spent his time at the computer, muttering. It was a side of Arbron I'd never really seen. Mostly he never seemed to take anything very seriously. At least he never took *me* seriously. But now he was spending days at the console.

Whenever I asked him what he was doing, he'd just say, <Unraveling a mystery.>

So I spent most of my time with the two humans. Or at least with Loren. Chapman was as 50

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brooding as Alloran. I stood beside Loren at the

"Do you have a mother at home? Does she window, and looked out at the blue and white worry about you?"

planet.

I felt a little uncomfortable talking about my parLoren did a thing she called "sitting." It's funny ents. An *aristh* in deep space can't start getting all to see at

first. But of course very practical for a twohomesick. Especially since Prince Alloran was nearby, legged creature.

able to overhear everything.

"The brown-and-green parts are land," Loren

<I guess she does. My father doesn't, though. was explaining. "The blue is ocean. Water. See the He was in the military, too, when he was young. Of bright white at the bottom? That's ice. It's called course, we had peace then. I guess maybe they do Antarctica. It's very cold."

worry I'll get hurt or whatever.>

<What sort of ice? Frozen carbon dioxide?

"We just had a war," Loren said. "That's . . . Methane?>

that's what happened to my dada He was in it. He

"Water. Just frozen water."

didn't get killed or anything. But he kind of . . . I

<Ah. Of course. That would make sense. And don't know. After he came back I guess he couldn't where do you live?>

cope with reality. So he left."I

"Well, see that continent there? The one on the saw Alloran's stalk eyes swivel to look at Loren. It upper left part of the planet? See where the line bewas practically the first time he'd even noticed tween night and day is? Almost right on that line." her.

She bit her lip. A lip is a mouth part. "My mom must

<You have wars?> I asked. <But you don't have be dying from worry. I've been gone for four days space travel. Who do you fight?> already."

Chapman arrived then, having arisen from a nap Dying? Humans could die of emotion? <Yes, but in his quarters. "We fight each other," he said. He soon you will be home. Then she won't worry anywinked one eye. "So, Loren, Daddy went nutso, more. Maybe she won't have to die.>

huh? Another whacked-out 'Nam vet? I guess some Loren smiled. "That's just an expression." guys can't take it."

Then I noticed that there were glistening drops Loren's eyes went wide, and then she turned on in her eyes.

Chapman.

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But it was Alloran who spoke. <Have you been

<I guess I'm not very funny.>

in a war, human?> he asked Chapman.

Loren tossed her head in such a way that her

"Me? No. Of course not. That war's over." long golden hair shimmered very nicely. "That's

<Then be quiet, fool. Those who have been to okay. I like serious guys. I guess if my memory is gone you understand. Those who have not have no opinion to be erased, it won't hurt if I ask questions. So. I'm worth hearing.> He looked directly at Loren. How come you don't have mouths?" she asked.

<Even those who return from war may never really Chapman seemed to snap out of a reverie. He'd come home.>

been looking at Alloran. Now he joined the conversation. Alloran turned his stalk eyes back to the helm, sation. "Loren, how can he answer that question?

and said nothing more. Chapman shrugged, but I He doesn't have a mouth. We do. Why do we have could see he was intrigued by Alloran.

mouths? Stupid question. I have a better question." So was I, to be honest. What was he talking He looked closely at me, focusing first on my stalk about? I'd never heard of an Andalite warrior come yes, and then back down on my main eyes. Like he came back from the war unable to cope, as Loren had couldn't make up his mind where to look.

put it. Or "whacked-out," as Chapman had said.

"Look, Elfangor, maybe we got off to a bad Why would Alloran feel such sympathy?

start, you and me. I wasn't in a great mood, you

"Anyway . . .," Loren began, "tell me this. know? But hey, you guys are really missing out on When you erase my memory, I won't remember any something here. Do you have any idea how much of this? Not even you?"

money we could get for this technology on Earth? I I didn't answer. What could I say?

mean, you could ask for anything!"

"It's okay, I'm not mad at you," Loren said. It was my turn to laugh. <What would we do

"You're taking us home. And you saved us from with Earth money?>

those Skritch Noses."

He shrugged. "Okay, forget money. How about

<Skrit Na,> I corrected.

power? We could snap our fingers and have all the presidents and prime ministers on Earth waiting on

"I know. It was a joke. Maybe not a very funny us. We could rule."

joke, I guess."

<Ah. Humor. Yes, Arbronn does that sometimes.> "

<We're Andalites,> I said, <not Yeerks. We But not you?"

aren't interested in ruling other species.> 54

"Ah. Well, that's good, I guess. Yeah, that's a other. <This can't be,> I said. <Any first-year good thing. But we could bring peace to Earth. No student could tell you this is impossible. Unless . more wars."

.> I felt a chill run up my spine. <Alloran! Prince

<Okay. That's it. That's it. Elfangor!> It was ArAlloran! Sir, you should see this.> bron. He'd been totally absorbed in staring at the The prince turned away from the helm and trotcomputer display. He'd barely spoken for the last ted back to us. <What is it, *arisths*?> he said wearily. two days.

But then his stalk eyes focused on the screen. A secI went to him. I was glad to be away from Chapond later he was staring with full intensity at the imman. He bothered me. He was completely different age there. <Computer. Cross-check for any visual than the human Loren.

files!> To Arbron and me he said, <They would have

<What is it?> I asked Arbron as I came to stand made more recordings!>

beside him. I looked past him to the computer And then it appeared. It simply appeared on the display. It showed a power field, lines of computer screen.

intensity in three dimensions. But it also showed It was perfectly spherical. A simple white sphere. lines extending strongly into Zero-space.

It looked harmless, even dull. And yet it was the It was impossible. A simulation of some sort. A most dangerous, deadly weapon any race had ever fake.

created.

Arbron turned only his stalk eyes toward me. Because of what it was, it could not be physically

<This is from the Skrit Na ship. From the computer destroyed. But it had been hidden. As we watched, download. It was encrypted, but I broke the code. dumbfounded and afraid, the computer replayed I've been going through the ship's log. A bunch of the Skrit Na computer log.

stupid stuff, mostly. Junk. But yesterday I found It had been hidden on the planet called Earth. It this. I've been trying to figure it out, because, see, had been buried deep in the ground in a desolatethere's no way these sensor readings can be right. looking area of blowing sand. And a huge stone But now I think I've got it. I know what it is.> He pyramid had been raised over it.

turned all the way to face me. <Elfangor, I think Hidden for fifty thousand years.

this is *real*.>

Hidden on an insignificant planet at the far end For several seconds we both just stared at each of the galaxy. And now it had reappeared.

chapter 9

"Hey, what's the matter with you guys?" Loren asked. "You all look like you've seen a ghost."

<The Time Matrix!> Arbron said. <I thought it was just a myth.>

<The second Skrit Na ship!> I yelled, suddenly realizing the truth. <The Skrit Na dug it up. They have it aboard the second ship, the one that Arbron and I tore that Skrit Na computer downscaped into Zero-space!> load apart. And before we translated into

I looked to Alloran. To my surprise, his eyes were Zero-space we had a destination in mind. One of alight with fierce pleasure. <The Time Matrix!

the last places in the universe that any sensible Hidden for fifty thousand years, and now dug up by Andalite would ever want to go.

the Skrit Na. The deadliest weapon in all of galactic The Taxxon home world.

history . . . and no one but us to go and get it back. As we spent timeless time traveling through the

>

blank white nondistance of Zero-space, Alloran It was as if Alloran were suddenly ten years called a council. It was just for the three of us, but younger. <Elfangor! Arbron! Get back on that Skrit the Jahar was too small for us to keep the two huNa computer log, both of you. We need to know mans out. They squatted on the floor near our where that second ship ran to! Now!>

hooves.

He turned to Loren and Chapman. <I apologize, We excluded them from our thought-speak at

aliens, but we cannot take you straight back to your first, keeping our conversation private.

planet. There is no time to waste. The existence of

<Taxxon home world is our destination,> Alloran the entire galaxy is at stake!>

said. <But the Skrit Na would not be taking the Time Arbron looked at me and sent me a private

Matrix there. So I believe the Skrit Na don't know thought-speak message. <I guess we may still get a what they have. They saw strange power patterns chance at being heroes.>

and decided, with the usual Skrit Na simplemindedness, to steal first and figure it out later.>

<I agree, sir,> Arbron said. <If they knew they 59

had the Time Matrix they'd do one of two things. I turned one eye toward Alloran. He nodded

Head straight for the Yeerk home world to sell it to slightly, giving me permission.

the Yeerks. Or else head home to use it for their

<Yes, Loren,> I said. <We are going into terrible own people. But the Taxxon home world is —> danger. If we are taken, the two of you will be killed

"Hey. Hey!" Chapman interrupted. "You're door enslaved.> ing your little telepathy thing and keeping us out. Chapman's eyes blazed. "You're dragging us I'm not an idiot."

into a battle and we can't even know what's going

<This does not involve either of you,> I said on? Is that Andalite fairness?" curtly.

I started to tell the annoying creature to be Chapman stood up and grabbed me roughly by

silent, but Alloran spoke.

the shoulder. I twitched my tail out of reflex. No An<You two aliens have a right to know what you dalite would ever grab another Andalite.

are being "dragged into," as you put it. We are goChapman laughed rudely. "You don't scare me. I ing to a planet of creatures who are allies of the know you can kill us both. But that's not your style, Yeerks. The Yeerks are parasites who seize control of is it? Dragging us off across the galaxy is your the bodies and minds of other creatures. The Taxxons style."

have been enslaved this way. By their own choice.>

<We have an emergency,> I said. <We regret I said, <The Skrit Na have apparently discovered that we cannot take you straight back to your the long-lost Time Matrix. This is a device that alplanet. However —> lows people to move forward or backward in time.

"However nothing," Chapman said. "This little It is the most dangerous weapon imaginable.> trip involves danger, doesn't it? You boys are in

"Why would a time machine be a weapon?" deep. Like I said, I'm not an idiot. I can see you three Loren asked.

are tense. I can see you're worried. Wherever it is But Chapman had already figured it out. "Duh. I we're going, you're scared. Which means me and go back in time and change history to wipe you out the girl here should be afraid, too, right?" in the present. I could kill your parents before they Loren stood up and looked right at me. "Is that had you, and you'd never exist." He grinned. " true, Elfangor? Are you taking us into danger?" Better yet, I could go all the way back in time, back to

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prehistoric days and find the earliest ancestors of were the slave warriors of the Yeerk Empire now humans and kill them. The entire human race would because we'd failed to save them.

cease to exist." Chapman laughed. "I see why you

<Translation to normal space in one minute,> guys are worried. If these Yeerks of yours get this the computer announced without emotion.

thing, it's bye-bye Andalites."

<Okay,> Alloran said, breaking the spell he had That did it. I didn't like this creature. I didn't care cast over us all. <We'll be coming out of Z-space if he was just a primitive alien, I didn't like him. I fairly close to the Taxxon world. The area will be pushed my face close to his. I brought my tail up thick with Yeerk ships. The Jahar has excellent into a threat position. <You'd better understand stealth shielding, but we may still be detected. From something, human. If it's "bye-bye" Andalites, it'll now on, we are on battle alert.>

be "bye-bye" humans, sooner or later. Who do you

<What's the plan?> Arbron asked nervously. think keeps the Yeerks from conquering every sen<What do we do?> tient race in the galaxy? We do.>

Alloran laughed. <What's the plan? We locate

"Maybe I'm with the wrong aliens," Chapman the Skrit Na ship. And if it has landed, we go down sneered. "Maybe it's too bad I wasn't grabbed after it and take back the Time Matrix. Of course, by the Yeerks. They sound like the winners." we'd be a little obvious walking around as

To my surprise, Prince Alloran actually laughed. Andalites. So . . .>

<You may be right, human. But you'd better hope

<Down to the surface of the Taxxon world?> I you're not. I've seen what the Yeerks do to captive asked in horror. <You mean . . . sir, are you planets. I was there when the Yeerks took the Horkplanning for us to morph Taxxons?> Bajir world. Pray to whatever primitive gods you Alloran looked very seriously at Arbron and me. have, human, that the Yeerks don't ever take your

<You two arisths are going to have to grow up very world.>

fast now. I need warriors at my side. Are you ready I shot a glance at Arbron. He was as surprised as to be warriors?>

I was. Moran had been there at the loss of the In my daydreams as a young aristh I had imagHork-Bajir world?

ined a moment like this. I had imagined a time comThe loss of the Hork-Bajir was the single biggest ing when I would be called upon to be brave and to disaster in our war with the Yeerks. The Hork-Bajir save my people. And in my imagination I had al62

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chapter 10

ways faced this kind of moment with pride and without fear.

And now, suddenly, my daydream was reality. And all I felt was sick dread.

The Taxxon world! It was a place from a nightmare.

<We're ready, Prince Alloran,> I said, as boldly Down to the Taxxon world!

as I could. <We are ready to be your warriors. We're The *Jahar* was cloaked, hidden from sight and not afraid.>

from most sensors. But a close sensor sweep by a I saw Arbron's face. He was as sick with fear as I Yeerk ship would reveal us. And we would never be was. But still he managed to smirk. He knew me too able to land on the planet in the *Jabal*: well.

We needed a victim.

He knew I was lying.

We found it, out beyond the Taxxon world's

third moon. It was a slow-moving transport ship. It was just arriving in the system, which meant they would be expecting it down on the surface. Perfect for our needs.

The trick was to disable the ship to make it stop, but not destroy it.

<This will take precise aim,> Alloran said. <Which of you two is a better shot?>

I wanted to say that I. was. But I knew Arbron was better. And we could not afford to fail. <Arbron is the one who hit the Skrit Na ship.>

Alloran nodded. <Let's see what you can do, *Aristh* Arbron. We need to hit one engine, but leave 64

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the other functioning. And we don't want any unwould encounter. Would it be Hork-Bajirfortunate explosions.> Controllers? Taxxon-Controllers? Or some other Arbron took the shredder controls in his hands. fierce, unknown species the Yeerks controlled?

The Yeerk transport ship was two thousand miles

<A word of advice,> Alloran said. <Taxxons may away. The target engine was about forty feet long. be repulsive, but never forget that down in their Arbron keyed into the computer targeting sysbrains they have a Yeerk. You're dealing with a tem and made careful adjustments while all of us —

Yeerks, not just a Taxxon.>

Alloran, the two humans, and I — watched.

Alloran, Arbron, and I pressed close to the hatch, There was a hum as the shredder fired. We saw waiting for it to blow open. We carried handheld the pale green beam lance forward into darkness. shredders on setting three. There are six power levAnd on the screen, with magnification at factor five els on a shredder. Level one delivers a mild charge hundred, we saw the near-side engine pod of the that will stun a small creature for a moment or two. Yeerk ship glow red and green.

Level six will blast a hole through ten feet of solid al<Good shooting!> Alloran said. <They'll waste loy. Level three wouldn't kill most creatures, but it half an hour trying to figure out what happened and would certainly knock them down so hard they reconfiguring to fly with just one engine. *Aristh* wouldn't get up for hours.

Elfangor, take us in fast!>

At that moment, waiting to rush a deadly enI punched up a burn and we rocketed forward, emy, I struggled to recall everything old Sofor had descending on the crippled transport. We were ever tried to teach me about combat. But I swear I alongside the transport before they knew we were couldn't remember a word. Maybe Prince Alloran there.

was calm, but I sure wasn't.

<Jam their communications,> Alloran ordered,

<Remember, don't kill them all,> Alloran said. and I feverishly punched the flat surface of the tacti<We may need to acquire them.> cal board with my fingers.

"Good luck," Loren said.

It was my second boarding of an alien vessel. I And then the hatch blew.

guess I should have felt like I was an old hand. But

BOOM!

this wasn't some lame bunch of Skrit Na. This was a In a rush of wind from the explosion, we launched Yeerk ship. We had no way of knowing what we ourselves into the Yeerk transport. Taxxons!

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If you've never faced a Taxxon, let me tell you: area. Screens blew out. Sheet-plastic panels crumThey are shocking things to see up close. They are pled. Sparks exploded in brilliant waterfalls from tubular, like a monstrosly thick, ten-foot-long hose. popped conduits overhead.

They have rows of needle-sharp, cone-shaped legs.

<Stop firing!> Alloran ordered. <We'll destroy The upper third of their body is held upright, and the ship!>

there the rows of legs become smaller and form tiny Behind me, a Taxxon! Dragon beam coming up!

two-and three-fingered hands.

I didn't pause to think. I just jerked my tail. My There is a row of dark red eyes, each like contain blade sliced through the air and separated the gealed liquid. At the very top is the mouth, a round, Taxxon's arm from his body. The arm fell to the red-rimmed hole circled with vicious rows of teeth. deck, still weakly clutching the Dragon beam. There were half a dozen of these creatures prac"SSSRREEEEE-WWWAAARR!" t h e T a x x o n tically encircling us. For a frozen moment no one screamed.

moved. I don't think the Yeerks could quite believe Now there were only two Taxxons still standing, that they were being boarded by Andalites, right and they knew they were beaten. They backed there in orbit around the Taxxon home world. away as fast as they could motor their cone legs. But Then everyone unfroze at once!

even then, and even with the Yeerks in their heads, On my left, one Taxxon raised a Dragon beam the Taxxons' evil instincts would not be denied. As and aimed it at me.

they backed away they bent low to tear chunks of

<Ahhh!> I yelled and pulled the trigger of my flesh from their dead companions.

shredder.

The Taxxons are cannibalistic. Not a nice species.

TTTTSSSAAAPPP!

And according to everything we knew about them, The Taxxon crumpled. not even the Yeerks inside them could control that

TTTTSSSSAAAAPPP! TTTTSSSSAAAAPPPP!

foul hunger of theirs.

Shredders fired.

<All right!> Arbron cried. <We got 'em!>

TSEEEWWWW! TSEEEWWWW! TSEEEWWWW!

<Shut up, you young fool,> Alloran snapped. Dracon beams fired!

Alloran had already guessed why the TaxxonThe air was instantly as hot as an oven. Shock Controllers were pulling back. They didn't want to waves from all the weapons rocked the enclosed be in the way when serious trouble showed up.
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And that serious trouble was just becoming visiAnd when Alloran was outflanked by one of his ble through the haze of smoke from burning, sparkopponents, I struck again. ing panels.

And when Arbron was knocked down by his

Seven feet tall. Razor-sharp blades at the wrists. Hork-Bajir opponent, I struck again.

Razor-sharp blades at their elbows. And knees. And I struck and struck and struck till Hork-Bajir tails. And two or three huge, forward-swept blood ran on the decks.

horn-blades on the tops of their snakelike heads. And when my own conscious mind returned, it Hork-Bajir!

seemed as if hours had gone by. Arbron was staring

<Well, well,> Alloran said, <it's been a while at me like he'd seen a ghost. Alloran was nodding since I fought a Hork-Bajir. I'll take the two big ones grimly, as if he recognized something about me. in the middle.>

Wounded Hork-Bajir, and worse than wounded, That left a Hork-Bajir warrior each for me and were lying in Taxxon gore on the deck.

Arbron.

<No,> I whispered.

Two full-grown, adult Hork-Bajir, each with a I turned and ran back through the hatch to the wily Yeerk in its head.

Jahar.

<I'm thinking maybe we should both have paid I ran and slipped and fell to my knees, with more attention to old Sofor,> Arbron said, making a nowhere else to run.

grim joke.

It was the human, Loren, who ran to me and put I saw the Hork-Bajir advance on me. I heard Soher strange human arms around my chest and with for's voice in my head. *Don't think, Elfangor. It's all* one hand pressed my face into her long golden hair. *instinct and training now.*

I let go of my conscious mind. I simply let it slip away. And in its place, a tingling energy seemed to fill me up. It was as if I were charged with electricity. As if sparks might fly from my hooves and tail. The Hork-Bajir came on toward me. And I

struck.

I struck!

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chapter 11

Alloran came over and glanced at Arbron's arm.

<You'll be okay, aristh,> he said. <Go back to the weapons station. We've just started here. We have to fly this Yeerk crate down to the planet. Aristh Elfangor, you take the helm. The controls are more primitive than our own ships, but —>

Neither Arbron nor I had moved. Alloran glared I shook myself free of Loren, appalled and

at me, furious that I was ignoring his order. But then ashamed by my behavior. What was the matter I saw his expression soften.

with me? I was behaving like a child, not an aristh.

<It's your first time. You fought well. Both of Then I saw Arbron.

you. It's always hard the first time. And it never gets He had been cut. He was bleeding from a deep easy. But I need you both. Now.>

gash in his left arm. His main eyes were wide with I nodded. <Yes, Prince Alloran. I'll take the what might almost have been panic.

helm.>

Alloran was busy tying up the injured Hork-Bajir.

<You. Alien,> he said to Loren. <Get back into The injured Taxxons were shoved into a small the Jahar. We'll be away for a while. Don't touch storeroom. Alloran sealed them in by welding anything.>

the door with his shredder.

Loren turned her head to look back over her

"Are you okay?" Loren asked me.

shoulder. Humans have to do that in order to see

<Yes. Of course. I'm fine,> I said harshly. But my behind them. She was obviously hesitating. She bit insides were churning. Some awful feeling was eather lower lip with her short white teeth. ing into my thoughts. I felt stunned. I felt like I wasn'

<What is it?> I asked.

t even me. It was like I was some totally different Still she hesitated. Then, "Look, tell me the person, standing off to one side, just watching truth. Swear by whatever it is that is really important myself.

to you. Swear that you're going to take Chapman Loren left me alone and went to Arbron. She and me back to Earth."

tore the sleeve off her shirt and wrapped it around

<Of course we are. As soon as we can,> I said. Arbron's bleeding arm.

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She sighed, a sound that involved blowing air The hatch closed, shutting Loren the human off out of her mouth. "Look, it's Chapman. I'm sure from sight.

he's a nice guy and all, really . . ." *She would be all right*, I told myself. The *Jahar*

<You don't trust him.>

was well-shielded. With the engines off it would be

"If you leave the two of us here on the *Jahar*, almost impossible for the Yeerks to detect. And she he'll try something. I know he will. And I know you had the shredder in case the other human tried to think we're too primitive to be able to fly your ship start trouble.

or whatever, but don't count on it. Chapman I focused on understanding the ship's controls. doesn't like you."

They were designed for Taxxon hands. But the

<Yes. I got that impression,> I said. <But we can basics were still the basics. I calculated a simple tell the ship's computer not to allow him to do anyapproach to the Taxxon world's main spaceport. I thing. He won't be able to fly the ship or use comfired the engines and then, as we moved away, munications. It will be all right.> With my stalk eyes gathering speed, I looked back and saw the *Jahar*. I saw that Prince Alloran was busy with Arbron.

<These humans are a pain in the hindquarters,>

<Here. Take this. Hide it under your clothing. Use Arbron said. <As if we don't have enough trouble?

it if Chapman makes trouble for you. It is set to level We have to watch over a pair of primitive aliens?> two. Just point it and squeeze the trigger.>

<She's a million light-years from her home, ArLoren took the shredder from me and slipped it bron. Confronting species she never knew existed. under her shirt. "Listen . . . good luck down on the Suddenly thrust into the middle of an intergalactic planet. Whatever you're doing down there." war. I think she is very brave.>

Then she put her face close to mine and pressed Arbron busied himself with learning the comher lips against the side of my face. It was a very puter station of the strange ship. But then, in a careodd thing to do. Not something any Andalite would fully offhand way, he said, <By the way, thanks. You ever do. And yet I did not mind it.

saved my life back there. I guess you absorbed more

<Aristh Elfangor? Whenever you have the time from old Sofor than you thought, huh?>

to join us . . . ,> Alloran said acidly.

<I guess so,> I said.

<Ready, sir! Preparing to sever the connection

<You were something, Elfangor. You scared me. with the *Jahar*.>

Hey, I think you even scared Alloran. You really —> 74

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chapter 12

<Okay, shut up, all right?>

<I was just saying you were great back there. Faster-than-light tail action. When you cut that one big Hork-Bajir's head? That was amazing.> I wanted Arbron to shut up. I didn't want to think about what had happened. I didn't want to remember it. **We had shoved the Taxxons and the badly**

And yet this other part of me was hanging on **wounded Hork-Bajir into the cargo hold of the** every word. This other part of me was replaying the **ship**. We had not even looked into the hold to see fight in my head, seeing myself as Elfangor, the what else might be in there.

great hero.

Now we looked.

<Course laid in?> Alloran asked me.

We opened the door and Alloran and Arbron

<Yes, Prince. We should be arriving in thirty stood with their shredders ready in case the survivminutes.> ing Taxxons tried to attack us. But the two Taxxons

<Good. Then it's time. We need to acquire the had other things on their minds.

Taxxons.>

They were attempting to kill and eat each other. To acquire is to absorb the DNA of a species. It is They had already finished off the wounded the first step in morphing that creature.

HorkBajir.

We were going to become Taxxons.

<Stop it or I'll kill you both!> Alloran yelled. But the Taxxons were out of control, caught up in their own evil bloodlust. It was a vile thing to watch. Taxxons don't have powerful tails like us, or blades like the Hork-Bajir. They can only rear up and slam their upper bodies against each other while trying to gouge with their round mouths.

<Their Yeerks have left them,> Alloran said.

<This is how Taxxons behave when they are not 76

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Controllers. Their Yeerk parasites have left them to

<We seal the bridge then open the outer hatch,> destroy each other.>

Alloran said calmly.

<Where did the Yeerks go?> I asked.

It took me a few seconds to realize what he was Alloran calmly leveled his shredder at the Taxxons saying. If we opened the outer hatch while we were and fired. It was a low-level blast, just enough to still in space, the vacuum would suck everything in knock the Taxxons unconscious.

the hold out. Out into the airless cold. The Yeerks We stepped past their sagging bodies, careful to would die almost instantly.

keep our hooves out of the gore. Behind them, the

<Prince Alloran, we can't just kill them all,> I hold of the ship was filled with transparent circular said. I looked closely at him to see if maybe he had tanks. It was too dark to see what was in the tanks. been joking.

<Computer. Lights,> Alloran said.

His eyes were cold. <Aristh Elfangor, I give the Lights came o n , and I instantly wished they orders. You obey the orders.> hadn't.

<But they're helpless,> I protested.

The hold of the ship stretched for perhaps a hundred feet straight back, with a width of a third that. rather wait till they have Taxxon bodies?> Filling most of that space, glowing a sludgy green, I didn't know what to say. I looked at Arbron. He were dozens of tanks.

kept his face carefully expressionless.

And in each tank, swimming through the viscous

<We ... we can't do this,> I said. <It's wrong. liquid, were gray slugs.

They are our prisoners. We can't! It would be

<Yeerks!> I said.

murder!>

<There must be thousands! Tens of thousands!>

<Be careful what you accuse me of, *Aristh* ElfanArbron said. gor,> Alloran said harshly. <You're a child, so I for<I suspected this might be the case,> Alloran give your impertinence. This time. But you are here said. <These are Yeerks being transported to the to learn, not to question orders. And one of the Taxxon world. They're here to get bodies. Hosts. things you'll learn, my idealistic *aristh*, is that war is Each of these will be given a Taxxon.>

not about striking brave poses and playing the hero.

<What do we do with them?> I asked.

War is about killing.>

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<Andalites do not kill prisoners,> I said. It was true. Maybe. But was it enough to get the Alloran laughed. <Is that what they taught prince to back off? you in school?> He laughed again. <Well, child, I

<Well, we wouldn't want that,> Alloran said sarlearned my lessons in the battle for the Hork-Bajir castically. <We'll wait till we've completed our world, not in a classroom. And let me tell you: The mission on the surface. Then, as we leave the only thing that matters is staying alive. Besides, little system, we'll clean out this filth.>

aristh Elfangor, it's a bit late for you to get delicate. I breathed again. But I wasn't fooling myself. I Not now, with the blood of your enemies staining had made an enemy of Prince Alloran. And I wasn't your tail.>

sure I could count on Arbron, either.

This wasn't happening. It couldn't be. Alloran

<Time to acquire the Taxxons, if that meets with was a war-prince. I couldn't disobey a war-prince. *Aristh* Elfangor's high moral code,> Alloran said. But this was monstrous.

I turned away and walked back to the two

<I won't kill prisoners,> I said. <Not even Yeerks.> stunned Taxxons. Without hesitating, I placed my

<I could execute you right now for disobeying hand on one of the Taxxons' slimy flesh.

me,> Alloran said.

Morphing technology allows a person to absorb For a moment that seemed to stretch on and on, the DNA of any creature he touches. It takes conwe stood there, face-to-face. I could barely breathe. centration and focus, because the biotechnology of I was risking my life, and probably destroying my morphing is triggered by thought commands.

future in the military, just to save my enemies. It was *Focus*, I told myself. *Put everything else out of insane!*

your mind, and let the Taxxon become a part of But I could not imagine myself sending the

you.

Yeerks flying off into the vacuum of space. I And as I stood there, the Taxxon's DNA migrated couldn't do it.

into me.

<Sir,> Arbron said tentatively. <We are so close My life, which had gone rapidly downhill at a to the planet surface that Yeerk sensors might pick shocking speed, was about to get much worse. up the heat signature of thousands of Yeerks And then, with the skeptical eyes of Prince Allobeing . . . flushed . . . into space. And they would ran and the frightened stare of Arbron upon me, I investigate.>

began to morph.

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chapter 13

Taxxons are a nauseating species. Even if you've seen holograms of them. But trust me, till you've been up close to a Taxxon, you just don't know how awful they are. The smell alone is enough to make you sick.

But now I had no choice. I had to show Alloran that I was still a good soldier. I had to prove that I **As an Andalite aristh, I'd been trained in mor-**

was brave, no matter what he thought of me. I **phing**. Back at basic training they first transformed couldn't show any hesitation.

us with the morphing technology. And they gave us So I focused my mind on becoming the Taxxon. a *djabala* to acquire and morph.

And the changes began immediately.

A *djabala* is a small, six-legged animal, maybe a I felt my upper torso begin to melt down into third the size of a young Andalite. It has a mouth my lower body. As I watched, my blue-and-tan fur and a tail and no natural weapons. It lives by climbceased being individual hairs and melted into a ing trees and eating the highest leaves.

plasticlike covering. The bare flesh on my upper You have to morph the *djabala* in order to pass body did the same thing, turning hard and shiny. the morphing proficiency test. So I did. But then, I felt myself falling as my legs shrank. They like a lot of *arisths*, I morphed a *kafit* bird. I have seemed to be sucked up into my body. Way too heard that some planets have many types of bird. fast!

But since we only have three, and since the *kafit* is My stomach hit the deck so hard it knocked the the best species of the three, it's popular with young air out of me.

cadets looking for fun.

Then, almost as quickly, I was lifted back up off It was a wonderful experience. I always loved the deck. Dozens of sharp cones were sprouting the idea of flying. But of course, morphing for pleafrom my belly. I was growing Taxxon legs. sure is discouraged. So I only did it one time. I looked backward through my stalk eyes and That was all the morphing I had done. A *djabala* saw that my body was stretching out behind me. I and a *kafit* bird. I had never even dreamed of morwas rapidly becoming a fat worm. Ten feet of phing a Taxxon.

rippling, slimy segments rolled backward, engulfing 82

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my tail. The process made a sound like wet cloth I never even felt the Taxxon's instincts well up being dragged over gravel.

beneath my own troubled and battered Andalite I could hear my own internal organs dissolving. mind. I had no warning. All at once, the Taxxon was Squishing, slippery sounds. I could hear other orin my head. gans, organs I didn't even have a name for, take How can I even convey the horror?

their place.

Have you ever felt in yourself some awful, evil Then . . . I was blind!

urge? Some fugitive thought that you quickly snuffed My eyes had all been blinded at once. I couldn't out? Well, as I became fully Taxxon, I felt such a see

anything. I felt fear grow within me. Fear that feeling. And it was not some faint wisp of thought, threatened to become panic. I was blind!

but a raging, screaming hunger.

Muddy at first, then sharper, my sight slowly reA hunger for anything living. turned. But it didn't exactly make me feel better. It A hunger for anything with a beating heart. was an eerie, distorted, broken world I saw. My shattered Taxxon eyes saw two Andalites. My own people! I wanted to devour my own

Taxxons have compound eyes. Each red globule people.

eye is really a thousand smaller eyeballs, each one But Taxxons are not fools. My Taxxon brain saw taking its own tiny picture of the world. Everything I and understood the Andalite tails. It knew they saw around me was shattered into a million small were weapons. It knew it could not fight them. And frames. It was overwhelming.

that weakness gave rise to a rage that was like a And then I felt something new. A new sense . . . nuclear fire in me.

I moved unfamiliar muscles and realized that I was hungry! Hunger like no hunger any other they operated my mouth. My round, red mouth. creature can ever know.

And through that mouth came a deluge of sensory As I struggled to reassert my own identity, I uninput. It was like smell. And like something I'd never derstood why the Taxxons had-made their alliance really experienced before. It's called the sense of with the Yeerks.

taste, I think.

The Yeerks had weapons. Weapons to use to

And what I tasted . . . what I smelled ... all that feed fresh, warm flesh to the raging Taxxon hunger. my senses cared about was the bright smell of The Taxxons had given up their freedom. But blood.

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chapter 14

freedom is nothing to a Taxxon, compared with that hunger.

<How are you doing, Elfangor?> Arbron asked me.

<Fine,> I lied. <Only . . .>

<Wh at?>

<When you morph, be very careful. Be strong. You'll have to fight the hunger.>

The hunger never went away. Even as we spiArbron laughed. <What, are you afraid I'm gonna raled down toward the Taxxon home world, I felt it. I was thankful Loren was safe back in the *Jahar*: morph and try to eat you?>

I don't know if I could have resisted the Taxxon's

<Yes, Arbron. I am afraid.>

appetite.

I really don't know.

As we came in for a landing, ground control appeared on our screens and demanded our clearance. Our ship's computer responded automatically. Ground control told us they were backed up on off-loading cargo. It would be half a day before they could unload the Yeerks in our hold.

I didn't know how to feel about that. I didn't want thousands of Yeerks to make it safely to their destination. But I didn't want to slaughter them, either. And I had no doubt: If we got away again in the Yeerk ship, Alloran meant to kill the Yeerks in the hold.

The spaceport was a large facility, obviously still under construction. As we came in low for a landing, descending through orange-and-green acid

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clouds, we could see dozens of other ships resting in than ten tall trees. Some lay almost flat, rising just a their cradles on the ground. Hundreds of Taxxons few feet from the dirt. Some were empty, but most and Gedds and even Hork-Bajir were busy building, held ships.

adding new capacity.

There were slow transports unloading cargo, But even amidst all the activity, we could spot fighters in for repairs, even a gigantic Yeerk Pool the Skrit Na raider ship. That was our target. If we ship. I could see the three spider legs of the Pool were right, the Time Matrix was aboard that ship. ship towering over the cradle. There were shredder A landing beam guided us to a cradle on the far burns and one of the "legs" was shattered. The ship edge of the facility. We were more than a mile away had been in a battle.

from the Skrit Na ship. A mile isn't much in space. Below the maze of cradles was bare, orange-red But on the ground, on an enemy planet, in a body dirt. Not a blade of grass, just dirt. There were primthat makes you want to scream, it's a very, very long itive magnetic levitation rails running through the distance.

massive forest of cradles. Train cars, some open,

<Whatever you do, remember what you are,> some enclosed bubbles, raced back and forth along Alloran instructed. <You're Taxxons, on a Taxxon the tracks.

planet. Act like it.>

Cargo was being loaded onto the train cars by The three of us, in Taxxon morph, exited out the Gedds. The Gedds were the Yeerks' first victims. The hatch and into the air of the Taxxon home world. first race they enslaved. Gedds almost seem to The first thing I noticed was that the sky was a walk on two legs, like humans, but they are pale gray-brown. The color of dust. The bright actually always hunched over so that they can clouds were too high up even to be seen. The seckeeep one hand on the ground for balance. ond thing I noticed was the smell. Everywhere, We took an open elevator from the cradle down warm, living hearts were beating. Hork-Bajir hearts. to the ground. As we descended, I counted

Gedd hearts. Taxxon hearts. Blood rushed through two ships landing and one taking off. The mag-lev veins. . . .

trains zipped back and forth on the dizzying The spaceport was a vast array of ship-cradles in array of tracks. On the ground, big tracked a dozen different sizes and shapes. Some were taller vehicles moved heavier loads.

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Everywhere were Taxxons, swaggering Horkscreaming worm myself! Rushing, pushing, shoving, Bajir, and busy, clumsy Gedds. Each was a desperate to reach him and ... and . . .

Controller. A slave to the Yeerk in its head. NO!

It was a huge, raucous, noisy place, full of steel I felt my own mind snap back to the surface. It and dust and the smells of solvents and Taxxon filth. had been overwhelmed by the Taxxon's own

<Busy,> Alloran muttered. <Awfully busy.> instincts. But even now, even with all my willpower, I knew what he meant. Back home, they'd told I couldn't resist!

us the Yeerks were being stopped by our forces. The It was as if I were being drawn by a magnet. As if average Andalite civilian thought we were beating I were being sucked into a black hole. The smell of the Yeerks. But this spaceport was evidence to the the wounded Taxxon, the fevered beating of

contrary. The spaceport, just one of several on this its heart, the . . .

one planet, was alive with hurried activity. NO!

Suddenly . . .

I was there. There, looking down at the injured

"Sssnnnrreewaaaaaa!"

Taxxon through my shattering compound eyes. I I looked up just in time to see a Taxxon slip from plunged my upper body downward, mouth open, the mag-lev train track overhead. He hit the ground teeth gnashing, ready to ..

like a bag of goo. His needle legs crumpled and his NO! NO! I pulled back.
But the power of that worm body split open.

hunger would not release me.

It was pandemonium! Taxxons came rushing

I motored my dozens of cone legs, pulling back, from all sides.

and the other, eager Taxxons pushed me aside, WHUMPF! A big Taxxon
slammed into me,

heedless.

practically knocking me over. More of them, all Where were Arbron and
Alloran?

rushing, came toward their fallen friend.

I'd lost them in my mad rush to feed.

But they were not rushing to help.

I pulled back and back farther, each step like movThey were rushing to eat
the still-living Taxxon. ing a million pounds. And yet I did move away. The Then
I felt the hunger. It swept me up. I couldn't feeding frenzy became ever more
nightmarish. Taxresist. I was moving forward, jostling to get at the xons crawled
over each other to get at the fresh meat. 90

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I managed to turn my huge, long worm body

Dracon beams. A Hork-Bajir can slice a Taxxon to around and ran from it. I
ran as fast as the Taxxon ribbons in seconds.

limbs would carry me.

And I had seen what happened to any Taxxon

I found a shaded spot under one of the towering careless enough to be
injured.

ship-cradles and I cowered there, using all my

"Welcome to the Taxxon home world," the strength to resist. Finally, after a
while, the frenzy Hork-Bajir said. "I am Sub-Visser Seven. You interpassed. Not
because I had grown strong. But simply est me. Yes, indeed. I am very interested
in any because I could now smell that there was no more Taxxon who will not eat
fresh meat."

meat left.

The Taxxon horde broke up and slithered off in various directions, back to
their work. Where was Arbron? Where was Prince Alloran?

I was lost and alone on the Taxxon world.

All I could think of doing was heading toward the Skrit Na ship. Hopefully,
my two fellow Andalites would be there.

I had to remind myself that we had a mission: the Time Matrix. If the Yeerks
realized what was in that Skrit Na ship, there would be no hope at all. Then,

although the image was fractured, I saw Hork-Bajir coming toward me. Six or seven of them, moving in swiftly. Surrounding me!

There was nothing I could do. I couldn't run. A ten-foot-long worm does not outrun a Hork-Bajir. One Hork-Bajir-Controller swaggered up before me. At a signal from him, the others all leveled Dracon beams straight at me. Not that they needed 93

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chapter 15

about the Yeerk foe. At the top of the Yeerk Empire is the Council of Thirteen. One of those thirteen is emperor, but no one knows which one. It's a closely guarded secret. The Yeerks fear assassination. Just below the Council of Thirteen are the visser. They are the generals of the Yeerk military. They are numbered according to their power and Morphing power is a wonderful tool. It allows importance. Visser One would be the most power Andalites to pass among many different species. It ful, on down through Visser Forty or so.

makes us the greatest spies in the galaxy.

A sub-visser is like a colonel. Very powerful, esBut it has an awful drawback. You see, if you pecially if he has a low number like seven. But not a stay more than two hours in morph, you stay there visser yet.

forever. You become a *nothlit*. An Andalite living The sub-visser spoke. "So, Andalite, how long out his life in a different body.

have you been in this morph?"

That was my greatest fear as the Hork-BajirI had to stop myself from crying aloud. He knew!

Controllers led me to a mag-lev train car. The He knew I was an Andalite.

sub-visser commandeered the train car. He ordered No . . . wait. Maybe he didn't know. Maybe he everyone else off. I stood there, helpless, surrounded, was trying to trick me.

as the mag-lev car shot away from the platform.

"Ssssewwaari ssstwweeshh," I said. I didn't It wound its way through the maze of shipknow what it meant. The Taxxon body had Taxxon cradles, through the construction workers who were instincts, but not a Taxxon's life learning. So I busy building up the might of the Yeerk Empire. couldn't speak the Taxxon language. But maybe the The Yeerk sub-visser said nothing. He seemed als-

visser couldn't, either. He'd been speaking most bored. He slouched his Hork-Bajir body and *Galard* so far — the language of interstellar trade watched the passing sights gloomily.

and commerce. It was the language many races had I watched him as well as I could with my Taxxon learned, back when the galaxy was at peace. It was eyes. A sub-visser is a high rank. I remembered that used to communicate between different species. from the basic training classes where they taught us The sub-visser looked at me with his slitted 94

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Hork-Bajir eyes. "Don't waste that snake-speak on Then, suddenly, the train car veered sharply left me. If you're one of us, you'll be able to speak and I saw a mound, almost a small mountain. It was *Galard*."

maybe two or three hundred feet high. Nothing but Was this another trap? Could Taxxon-Cona slag-heap of dirt excavated from the construction trollers speak *Galard*? Was it even possible for them, of ship-cradles, really.

with their strange mouths? I didn't know. I had no But it seethed.

experience speaking with sounds. And even though There were holes everywhere, holes the size of a I still had the translator chip in my head, it could not Taxxon. Taxxons were crawling in and out of the interface with my Taxxon brain. What could I do?

holes. Their pulsating worm bodies would slither The sub-visser laughed. "So. You want to resist and wallow into the mound. Others would emerge, me? Good. I need the entertainment. It's rather dull, seeming to almost blink with their foul red mouths. being in charge of security for this sector. I suppose

"Rebels are just fresh meat," Sub-Visser Seven you're one of the rebels. One of those mountain said calmly. "But being a Taxxon, you understand. Taxxons who refuse to join the Empire. Well, we'll Any rebels we catch go to feed loyal Taxxons. It's get to the truth quickly enough."

sad, really. But I have no choice. It's one of the idiMountain Taxxons? Rebels? I was so surprised I otic regulations I have to deal with. It's all part of our temporarily forgot to be terrified. There were still deal with the Taxxons: Any suspect Taxxon is turned Taxxons resisting the Yeerks? This would be huge over to loyal Taxxons for interrogation. Of course, news to my people. We'd assumed all the Taxxons Taxxons don't really interrogate. They don't have had accepted Yeerk rule in exchange for promises of the patience for it. They ask one or two questions, fresh, unusual meats.

then . . . well, then it's dinnertime." The train car was riding a hundred feet off the I must have quivered in terror. The sub-visser dismal plain now, just getting beyond the outskirts grinned a Hork-Bajir grin. "Of course, you could tell of the spaceport. Through the window I could actume why you're here, and what

your mission really ally see the cradled Skrit Na ship as we zipped past. is . . . Andalite. You'll still be executed, of course. I hoped Alloran and Arbron had made it there. I But I can make it painless. Much better than being hoped they would complete the mission. Because it eaten alive."

didn't look as if I would be there to help them. He did know what I was! He'd been toying with 96

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me. He knew I was an Andalite. But I sensed he was sparkling of tiny images to my Taxxon eyes. I could telling the truth: I could either confess and hear his heart beating faster.

de-morph, or die the death the Taxxon" There is one other possibility, Andalite. There Controllers would inflict.

has never been an Andalite-Controller. None of us This is what it had come to. All my hopes of behas ever succeeded in capturing an Andalite alive. ing a great hero. It all ended here, just this quickly. Your warriors use that nasty Andalite tail blade on I felt sick down to my bones. How had everythemselves rather than be taken alive." He grinned. thing gone so horribly wrong?

"Such a waste. Really. See, I want to be the first to But I couldn't tell the Yeerks anything. The Jahar have an Andalite body. With that body, with the was still up in orbit. If I confessed, the two humans Andalite morphing power, I wouldn't remain a subwould be taken by the Yeerks. Alloran and Arbron, visser for long. I could be a full visser." who were probably still free, might be caught, too. An Andalite-Controller? This Yeerk scum wanted And there was the Time Matrix. The Time Matrix to take over an Andalite body?

sat unnoticed in a Skrit Na ship, just a mile from I felt a wave of revulsion. A wave of revulsion where we stood. And that could mean the end of all that seemed to grow out of some deep insight, as if Andalites.

I had caught a glimpse of the future. I wasn't a mysI couldn't talk. I couldn't. tic. I was in the military. But still, I felt a weird, unsetThe sub-visser leaned close to me. He actually tling sensation.

whispered. "There is one other possibility. This I looked at the sub-visser. I looked into his Hork-Bajir body I use is fine, but there are millions of greedy, murderous eyes. And it was as if I could see Hork-Bajir-Controllers now. And what are my other him clearly. As if the veil of time was lifted. choices? To go back to being a Gedd? Or to take a And I knew then I would not die. Not yet, at Taxxon body? No thanks. I won't live with that least. I knew it deep in my heart. Because I knew Taxxon hunger."

that in looking at this creature, this Yeerk, I was The train plunged into the Taxxon hive. Darklooking at my true, personal enemy. ness descended. In the darkness, my Taxxon eyes

"Let me take that Andalite body," he said. " actually worked better.

You'll live. It's the only way you'll live." The sub-visser's Hork-Bajir face was a shattered

<My name is Elfangor, Yeerk,> I said. <Remem98

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chapter 16

ber the name. You'll be hearing it again. But you will never take me alive.>

"A pity," the Yeerk sneered. "Stop the car!" he yelled to his Hork-Bajir. "Open the door." The mag-lev train stopped smoothly. The door opened.

We were on a track deep inside the Taxxon hive. There was a large, open cavern around us, as if the **Falling ...**

hive was hollow at its core. And down below,

<Demorph!> I screamed at myself.

perhaps twenty feet down, there was a seething Even as I was falling, I was demorphing. If I was mass of Taxxons.

going to die, I'd die an Andalite, not some disgust"See them?" the sub-visser asked. "Taxxons. ing, cannibalistic worm.

Not Yeerks. No, those are Taxxons in their natural

WHUUUMMMPPFFFF!

state. Unimproved, you might say. As savage and I hit the ground. I hit it hard. The sides of my bloodthirsty as any creature in the galaxy." Taxxon body burst open from the impact. And in a The Taxxons below spotted us above them. They flash, the other Taxxons were on me.

raised their eternally hungry red mouths up to gape

<Demorph!>

at us. They knew what was going to happen next. But I couldn't possibly morph quickly enough. The Hork-Bajir surrounded me. I wanted to fight, Red Taxxon mouths drew back and rose up high, but I had no weapons. There was nothing I could do. plunging straight down into my shattered flesh.

"Throw him out," the sub-visser said. The pain of the fall had been dulled by sheer The Hork-Bajir rushed at me. They pushed my shock. But this pain .. . *this*

pain I felt. I have never sagging, flaccid flesh. I scrabbled desperately with known anything so terrible. In my darkest night my rows of cone legs, but it was useless. They rolled mare I've never even imagined . .

and shoved and slid me, helpless, to the door.

<Ahhhhhhhhhh!> I screamed. But just as loudly, And then I was falling ..

I screamed, <Demorph!>

It was a race. A race to see whether I would die before I could demorph. Again and again they 100

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ripped at me. But now my Taxxon flesh was shrink The Taxxons came at me again, rushing at me, ing away from them. It was changing. Becoming bold with hunger. But now the situation had some strange, new meat.

changed.

It would all depend on how the morph hap Oh, yes, the situation had definitely changed. pened. If my head emerged too soon, the Taxxons I aimed, I slashed! I aimed, I slashed! I aimed, I would simply rip it off. I didn't need my head. I slashed!

didn't even need my legs.

<Come on, you filthy worms! Come on! Come I needed my tail.

ON!>

If any Andalite in all of history needed his tail, I And suddenly, even the Taxxons had decided

needed mine. Right NOW!

they didn't want to eat me. Instead, the Taxxons I

<Ahhhhhhhhhh!> The pain was unbearable. I had cut were set upon by the rest.

was delirious, unable even to think, to focus, to Through my stalk eyes I saw the sub-visser and keep track of what was happening to me.

his Hork-Bajir soldiers looking down and laughing. It wasn't going to work! I had been wrong to The cold voice of the sub-visser said, "Kill him. hope. Wrong to imagine I could survive.

Shoot the Andalite scum."

But then . . . I felt some distant part of me move. The Hork-Bajir soldiers raised their weapons and And I sensed a shudder pass through the ravensighted on me. ous Taxxons.

TSEEWWW! TSEEWW!

With what was left of my Taxxon eyes, I saw it Dracon beams singed the air above me and

appear . . . all the way back at the end of my melted the dirt at my feet. I couldn't outrun them. I Taxxon body.

had to hide! But hide where?

A bright blade! My tail!

Oh.

I slashed! Missed!

I dove back into the Taxxon feeding frenzy. Their But it made the Taxxons back away. And while sluggish, sloppy bodies pressed in all around me. It they were reconsidering, my legs grew long and was sickening, but it gave me cover.

strong. The last of my bleeding worm body shrank

"Go in after him," the sub-visser ordered. "Cut and hardened. I heard bones growing inside me. him to pieces!"

And then I could see. I could see again!

Six huge Hork-Bajir leaped down from the train 102

track. There was no way I could defeat six HorkUp off the ground. Up from the dirt. I flew!

Bajir warriors. I was exhausted, on the edge of coll flew inches above the Hork-Bajir. I flew over lapse.

the sub-visser, who was now screaming in rage at But there was one last desperate hope. The *kafit* his soldiers. "Shoot it! Shoot it!" bird.

"But the Taxxons may be hit!" one of the HorkOnce you do a morph, the DNA stays with you. Bajir protested.

Once you've morphed a creature, you can morph it

"I really don't care, shoot! Shoot! Kill it!

again. And I needed wings as much as I'd needed S H O O O O O T ! " my tail.

But it was too late. I was in the air. I raced as fast I squirmed between the huge worms, keeping

as my wings would take me, back down the stinking away from their mouths. Not that they wanted to tunnel toward daylight. I saw the brown-gray light fight an Andalite right then.

ahead, and I flew toward it as if my life depended And as I felt the Taxxon flesh pressing in around on it.

me — smothering me, but at the same time hiding I exploded from the tunnel into the open with me from the Hork-Bajir — I morphed again. I shrank. I the outraged cries of the sub-visser ringing in my grew smaller and smaller.

ears.

"Back, you Taxxon *hogren kalach!*" the Hork<I made it!> I cried to no one but myself. <I Bajir yelled in a mix of *Galard* and the Hork-Bajir made it! I'm alive!>

language.

I flew at the *kafit* bird's top speed back toward The Taxxons began to pull away, driven back by the spaceport. Somewhere back there were Alloran slashing Hork-Bajir wrists and elbows. I was in the and Arbron. Somewhere back there the Time Matrix open. A Hork-Bajir was standing over me. He was still waited to be discovered. There was still a mislooking right down at me. sion and the hope of returning safe and alive to the Had I finished morphing?

Jahar:

No time to worry. I would either fly . . . or die. And . . . there was life. Life! Life never feels so I opened what I hoped were my six pairs of *kafit* sweet as when you've come right up against death. wings. I spread them wide. I flapped hard.

Then I saw it.

And I flew.

It was descending the last few feet into a large 104

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ship-cradle. It was unlike any other craft at the It walked on only two legs. spaceport. Unlike anything any Yeerk had ever deIt held up its hands, and said, "Hey, hey. Relax. signed or built.

You can put down the weapons. I'm not here to The Jahar!

fight. I'm here to trade."

The Jahar was landing.

Chapman!

It was impossible! There was no one aboard the He realized that the Yeerks did not understand Jahar but the two humans. How could it be landhim. So with his hands he pretended to be handing ing? Why was it landing?

them something, and then receiving something I soared as high as I could and saw that Yeerks in from them.

all shapes and sizes were rushing to meet the amazSub-Visser Seven strutted to meet the alien. He ing ship.

laughed cynically. "It wants to trade," he said. "This They clustered around, many with weapons

strange creature wants to trade. So. What do you drawn. Looking back, I saw a mag-lev train come have to trade, alien?"

tearing at top speed from the Taxxon mound. I Neither Sub-Visser Seven nor Chapman had unknew in my heart that Sub-Visser Seven was on that derstood a word the other had said. And yet, they train.

understood each other perfectly.

It took several minutes for the docking clamps to Chapman kept his hands raised and made a hube fitted to the alien craft. And more minutes while the man

smile. Then, very slowly, he stepped back into Yeerks trained every weapon they had on the one the shadowed interior of the ship. And when he small ship.

reappeared, he was shoving someone before him. The mag-lev train arrived, slamming carelessly It was Loren. She was bound with wire. Chapinto two slow-moving Gedds. Out stepped Subman pushed her viciously. She fell to the ground beVisser Seven. He had only four of his original six fore Sub-Visser Seven.

Hork-Bajir with him. I guess the other two had paid

"That's what I have to trade," Chapman said. " the ultimate price for failing their commander. A whole planet full of ... that."

The hatch of the Jahar appeared. It opened, and out stepped a creature no Yeerk had ever seen before.

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Alloran's Choice

chapter 17

It was an impossible situation.

I was alone. Alone on an alien planet. Scared, sick at hearts, and overwhelmed.

I flew high above the scene, floating on my six pairs of wings. I was in morph. A four-legged, twoarmed Andalite transformed into a twelve-winged *kafit* bird.

Below me was the horizon-to-horizon expanse of the spaceport on the Taxxon home world. Huge, weirdly shaped metal cradles nestled a stunning array of spacecraft. Craft from every corner of the everexpanding Yeerk Empire: transports and fighters and even a vast Yeerk Pool ship, sitting like a bloated, three-legged spider.

Half a mile to my left was the Skrit Na transport we had chased to the Taxxon world. Inside that ship, unknown to the Yeerks, was the Time Matrix.

Half a mile to my right was the Yeerk transport ship we had seized in orbit. It was loaded to the brim with Yeerks in their natural sluglike bodies. Big, 111

round tubs of Yeerk slugs. Yeerks I had saved when *Okay, Elfangor, calm down and think.*

Alloran ordered them destroyed.

But how could I be calm? The Yeerks were seizing And right below me was the *Jahar*. She was like a living Loren and roughly hustling her away. Chapman's work of art stuck in a junk pile. She glowed, beautiful, was trying to communicate with Sub-Visser Seven. amidst the clumsy Yeerk vessels.

Then it hit me: Chapman knew! He knew about And there, stepping from the *Jahar*, were the Time Matrix! If he found a way to tell the two odd creatures called humans.

Yeerks, we were all done for.

The one called Chapman shoved a helpless,

Okay, okay, so I had to do something. Somebody Loren. She fell before the feet of Sub-Visser's thing. *Something*. But what? What should I do?

Seven, the Yeerk in charge of security. The sub-Visser This was madness! The entire fate of my people visser was a Hork-Bajir-Controller.

rested on me? On *me*?

"That's what I have to trade," Chapman said. "Priorities. Okay, okay, what was most important? A whole planet full of . . . *that*." tant?

A hundred Yeerks in different forms — huge, Rescuing Loren.

glistening, wormlike Taxxon-Controllers, dangerous, bladed Hork-Bajir-Controllers, clumsy Gedds Everything came down to the Time Matrix. Controllers — all stood watching with bated breath. Was Chapman going to tell the sub-visser about Where was Arbronn, my fellow *aristh*? Where it? No. It was Chapman's biggest bargaining chip. was War-prince Alloran? The last I'd seen of This human was like a Skrit Na — self-serving, then they were in Taxxon morph. But the two-hour greedy, and very, very strange. The Skrit Na are time limit for staying in one morph had passed. I made up of two races. The Skrit look like huge insects could only hope they had demorphed at some sects and are somewhat less than intelligent. But the point.

Skrit each eventually weave a cocoon and a year later, out pops a Na. The Na stand on four slender

<Alloran should be dealing with all this,> I come legs, have heads shaped like Andalites, but only complained bitterly to no one. Alloran was the war-prince with two eyes. All the Skrit Na care about is own prince. He'd been in wars before. He had fought in the living and possessing things. And it seemed the huge Hork-Bajir war. I didn't know anything! I was a man Chapman was the very same way. So I truly nobody!

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believed he would not give up the Time Matrix just

<Tell the Yeerks whatever they want to know. yet.

Don't resist. Just one thing: Don't mention the Time I had time, but not much. The sub-visser would Matrix. If they get that, it's all over. You have to be kept busy with Chapman attempting to talk trust me. I will save you.>

about Earth. Like any Yeerk, Sub-Visser Seven Of course, the human Loren couldn't answer. would be fascinated by the possibility of an entire Humans don't have thought-speak. Like most

planet of sentient creatures for the Yeerk Empire to species, they make sounds to communicate. I could enslave.

only hope she would trust me.

Think, Elfangor. Think!

Right. She should trust me. Would I trust some I couldn't count on finding Alloran and Arbron. alien who'd landed me in this mess?

But if they were still alive and free, they would reach I could only hope. She had to keep quiet about the same conclusion I had: Go for the Skrit Na ship the Time Matrix. I knew Chapman would.

and its cargo, the Time Matrix.

I flew hard for the Skrit Na ship. At least I had a I turned in the air and flapped my many wings goal now. That helped. A little. And I just wouldn't hard as I headed toward the Skrit Na ship.

think about the insanity of it all. I would just put all Below I saw Hork-Bajir grab Loren and pull her that out of my head.

to her feet. They yanked her up by her golden hair The Skrit Na ship was being fussed over by

and a human cry of pain floated up to me.

Gedd-Controllers. Gedds are clumsy, loping crea *Priorities, Elfangor.* tures. They were the first species the Yeerks

<Loren. It's me, Elfangor!> I called down, focusinfested. Only low-ranking Yeerks were still stuck in ing my thought-speak on her alone.

Gedd bodies. These Gedd-Controllers seemed to be I saw her jerk and turn her head around the way busy checking the Skrit Na ship for hull damage. humans do to see behind them.

I had to get aboard that ship. And I had to fly it

<Stop. Don't move! Don't make them mad.

off the planet.

Don't worry, I'm using private thought-speak. No No *problem, Elfangor. Just steal the ship from* one else can hear.>

the middle of a Yeerk spaceport and fly it away She stopped twisting around and kept marching *without getting zapped. No big deal.*

forward between her Hork-Bajir captors.

I landed in the dirt beneath the ship's cradle. It 114

was dark and filthy down there. Endless debris and I swallowed my fear and loathing and began the trash had been shoved in over the years. They had morph.

apparently even emptied ships' sewage

And as I felt the huge worm body grow, and felt reprocessing plants there.

The smell was

the screaming, desperate Taxxon hunger rise overwhelming.

within me, I tried to form a plan. A plan to save my I demorphed amid the fossilized remains of

world, my friends, and Loren all at once.

sewage from a dozen species. Not pleasant. But I was halfway into Taxxon shape when I heard it was a good feeling to get my Andalite body the shuffling, slithering sound of a Taxxon. My stalk back.

eyes had already morphed away. But I still had my I cowered behind the massive support pillars as I main eyes. I turned to look.

watched my four legs grow from four of the *kafit's* It was just a dozen feet away. It must have been wings. Two other wings became my hands. My

lurking in the darkness. It had only to scream sleek bird head grew large and sprouted my twin for help and I'd be Taxxon lunch.

stalk eyes, while the bird's own two eyes became Then, to my surprise, the Taxxon spoke in Anmy main eyes. dalite thought-speak.

The remaining wings shriveled and disappeared

<Elfangor! Is that you?>

as my long, wispy bird tail became my swift, power<Arbron?> I cried. I was flooded with relief. I ful Andalite tail.

wouldn't be alone! I had Arbron with me. We'

I was so pleased to get my tail back. A bird's d never exactly been close friends, but at least he body can be pretty helpless. But unfortunately, I was one of my own.

couldn't stay in Andalite form. An Andalite

<Yes, it's me,> he said.

walking around on the Taxxon world,

<What happened to you?> I asked. <I lost you surrounded by nothing but various types of

and Alloran in that terrible feeding frenzy.> Yeerks, would be just slightly obvious. Slightly For a few moments Arbron said nothing. His siobvious, as in I'd have been dead ten seconds lence drew a chill up my half-morphed body. after I walked out of the shadows.

<I guess we got separated,> Arbron said flatly. I had only one way to go. I would have to re<So. We gonna rescue this Time Matrix thing sume the Taxxon

morph I had acquired. The Taxxon or what? Hero time, huh?>

DNA was still a part of me. It always would be. 117

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chapter 18

<Yeah. Hero time,> I agreed. But there was something wrong. Something very wrong. I could feel it.

<Where is Alloran?> I asked.

<I don't know. I lost him in the crowd. Just you and me, I guess. Come on. Let's do it. Let's save the world, hah-hah! Just what you planned, eh,

Elfangor? Elfangor the hero?>

<You have a plan?>

He seemed to alternate between being flat and

<Sure,> I said. <We bluff. We tell those Geddemotionless and sudden bursts of manic energy. Controllers up there that we've come to fix the Maybe it was the strain. The fear. And the vile computers. Then we fly that sorry Skrit Na ship creepiness of inhabiting a Taxxon form.

away.>

That had to be it. Nothing to worry about. Just I wanted to sound casual. Nonchalant. The way stress.

the fighter pilots always sound when they are de<If I end up being a hero, you'll be one, too,> I scribbling some terrifying battle. Like it was all no big said. <Besides, let's just see if we survive first.> deal.

<Yeah. Survive,> he said, flat and emotionless Arbron stared at me through red jelly Taxxon again. <Come on, Elfangor. Finish morphing.> eyes. <Okay. Lead the way,> he said.

Arbron and I slithered out from beneath the ship's cradle and motored our rows of Taxxon needle legs up the ramp to the ship itself. Just a pair of bored Taxxon technicians going to work. Totally calm.

Or as calm as any Taxxon, even a TaxxonController, can ever be. There is simply no way to explain the awful hunger of the Taxxon. It is beyond any hunger you've ever imagined. It is constant. 118

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Like a screaming voice in your head. Screaming so

"Rrr-what arrrrre you doing herrrrre?" loud you can't think.

If it was hard for the Gedds to make *Galard* Every living thing you see or smell is just meat to sounds, it was almost impossible for me, with a you. You hear beating hearts and smell rushing Taxxon's mouth and tongue. But I couldn't use blood and the hunger almost takes over your body. thought-speak. I might as well announce that I was And when someone is injured . . . when there is Andalite. I had to try to speak *Galard* with a threeblood spilled ... well then, as I knew personally, the foot-long Taxxon tongue.

hunger is all but impossible to resist.

So I tried. "Sreeeee snwwweeeyiir sreeeyah!" I had come within a haunch hair of eating an inWhich was not even close to being the sounds jured Taxxon myself. Not something I wanted to rel'd wanted to make. What I had meant to say was " member. But not something I'd ever forget.

computer repair." But the Taxxon's tongue is so

<Don't hesitate,> I advised Arbron as several long, that it would be hard even if I was used to usGedds turned to blink curiously at us. <Look like ing a mouth to make sounds.

you're on your way to work.>

The Gedds stared at me with its tiny yellow eyes. "

<Shut up, Elfangor,> Arbron said harshly. Rrr-use rrr pad!" He pointed furiously down at a Again I felt the chill of fear. Something was horsmall computer pad attached to his wrist. ribly wrong. But there was no stopping now. I

<It's some kind of translator,> Arbron said. pushed rudely past a Gedds who was in my way.

<Some primitive version of our own translator chips. The Gedds-Controllers looked resentful. But they Let me do it.>

had no reason to suspect us. We were Taxxons. He reached with one of his weak, two-fingered They had to assume we were Taxxon-Controllers. Taxxon hands and pressed several buttons. From We looked like we were there to work. No reason the pad came a disembodied voice, speaking

for them to be at all suspicious.

Galard.

Except that one of them was.

"Computer repair."

One of the Gedds-Controllers stood right in front The Gedds snorted angrily. "Rrryou Taxxon of us, seemingly unimpressed. He spoke in *Galard*, wearrers think you rrown the planet! Arrogant as the language of interstellar trade. It sounded hard Horrrk-Bajir!"

on his Gedds tongue, but I could understand him. Arbron and I shoved past him into the Skrit Na 120

ship. Unfortunately, it was so cramped and low that as I could. I felt the awful hunger weaken and my we could barely drag our massive bodies inside. own Andalite mind rise above, freed of the Taxxon's The bridge of the Skrit Na ship was identical to instincts.

the Skrit Na ship we'd boarded to rescue the two

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

humans. There were two cocooned Skrit glued into a The G e d d s w e r e p o u n d i n g o n t h e h u l l . corner. They wouldn't cause any trouble. They

"Rrrrwhat arrrrre you doing? Open rrrup!" didn't look ready to hatch into Na just yet. And I ignored the noise and punched the engine

there was an active Skrit, what Loren had described power. The main engines began to whine as they as a giant cockroach, scurrying around almost brainpowered up. lessly, polishing and cleaning.

And then I realized it. Arbron was not demorphThere were no Na that I could see. Aside from ing.

the Skrit, the bridge of the ship was empty.

<Arbron, what are you waiting for? Demorph!>

<So far, so good,> I muttered. <I'm going to Arbron didn't say anything.

close the hatch. We'll demorph, power up, and be offTHUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

planet before they know what's hit them.>

"Rrrr-open up! Powerrr down rrryou fool!"

<Yeah. Okay,> Arbron said. <Ready?>

<Arbron! What are you up to? Demorph!> I

<Yep.> I focused on my breathing, trying to yelled. I guess I hoped that yelling would make it fight the raging Taxxon hunger and my own fear. happen. But I already knew. He stared at me

<Okay, do it!>

through those shimmering red jelly eyes, and I Arbron punched the pad to close the hatch door. It knew. More quietly, almost begging, I said, <Come s l i d shut a n d made a s n u g v a c u u m s e a l o n, Arbron. Demorph.>

SHWOOMP!

<I really wish I could, Elfangor,> he said. <I really I focused all my thoughts on demorphing. I wish I could.>

wanted out of that Taxxon body. The two of us could barely move in the cramped bridge, let alone fly the ship. The idiot Skrit kept banging against me, unable to find a way to go around.

I demorphed. I shed that vile Taxxon body as fast 123

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chapter 19

<Then hang on, because I don't know how much of a kick these Skrit Na ships have.> I punched up a burn and we rose from the pad. Unfortunately, we didn't rise very quickly.

<What is the matter with this thing?> I yelled. I looked at the air speed indicator. We were doing a bare thousand miles per hour. And the acceleration there was no time to talk about it. We had to rate was way too slow.

get the Skrit Na ship up and out of that cradle

<It'll take us ten minutes just to get escape before it occurred to the Yeerks that we were locity!> Arbron cried.

stealing it.

<Yeerks ships will be all over us before we can No time to talk about it. But time to feel some even think about going to Zero-space,> I said. thing of the terror Arbron felt.

<The Time Matrix!> Arbron said. <We can use I had been in Taxxon morph. I had felt the

it! We can escape through time!>

hunger. I'd rather be dead than be trapped in that

<No! We don't know how fast it works. If we try body forever.

to activate the Time Matrix, the power signature will Arbron's weak Taxxon "arms" pushed all the light up every Yeerk sensor within a million miles!

right buttons, and I felt the soft vibration of the enWhat if it takes ten minutes for it to work?

gines reaching full power.

Besides . . . we don't know who else might get mad The Gedds-Controllers outside must have felt it, if you use that thing.>

too. Suddenly they stopped pounding on the ship.

<What? You're worried about what some prince They were probably running for dear life. The radiawill say if we survive?> tion blast of the engines would be captured and

<No. I'm not worried about our superiors. Or at contained within the cradle. But if you were still least, I figure my career in the military is already dehanding around on that cradle when the engines stroyed.>

came on, you wouldn't last long.

<Then what are you . . . > Arbron fell silent.

<Ready?> I asked Arbron.

Then he laughed. <Are you kidding me? You're

<Ready.>

worried about some mythical Ellimists?>

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<Mythical? That's what some people used to say are slow in atmosphere, right? They can't handle about the Time Matrix itself. Someone built that the heat. We can! So far, at least. We're doing machine. Who else, if not the Ellimists? And do we better than two thousand miles per hour. We're want to take the chance of making them angry?> faster than they are in atmosphere!>

I felt a little foolish. My parents had told me El<You're going to try and outrun them in the atlimist stories when I was a child. Stories of the allmosphere?> powerful, inexplicable creatures who sometimes

<You have a better option?>

interfered in the affairs of simpler species. I halfway

<We have a second Bug fighter on us!> Arbron expected a snide remark from Arbron.

answered. <Two more launching!>

But Arbron didn't answer. He was staring at his

<We're going to the grass,> I said, hoping I display board. At least, I guess he was staring. sounded more confident than I felt. <I'll need direct Taxxon eyes don't exactly focus normally. <Yeerk vision. Real time, real aspect. Open a window.> patrol ship coming up on an intercept vector! It's a Arbron played his console, and suddenly the Bug fighter!>

panel in front of me became a window. I could see

<Can we take on a Bug fighter?>

the superheated air, blazing around the ship.

<Are you kidding? All the Skrit Na ever have I nosed the stubby, round ship down. As we

are secondhand, low-power Dracon beams the

dropped we picked up speed. <Passing three thouYeerks sell off for scrap.
That Bug fighter has twin sand miles per hour!>

Penetrator-Class Dracon beams. We can't trade Down, down, down at over
three thousand mph!

shots with them!>

The brown dust of the Taxxon world leaped up at He was right. And I should
have remembered

us.

that. But I was shaken. Confused. My brain was Spacecraft are designed for
the almost total vacspinning at a million revolutions per second and goum of
space. Usually they are barely functional in ing nowhere.

atmosphere. But the Skrit Na were scavengers who I had to think. Focus.

went from planet to planet, kidnapping and stealing The air speed gauge now
showed two thousand and performing their inexplicable medical

twenty miles per hour. The hull was blistering hot experiments. So they
needed ships that could from the air resistance. <Wait a minute! Bug fighters
handle atmosphere.

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But nothing is really designed to do three thou<Three thousand two hundred
miles per hour,> sand miles an hour in atmosphere. Let alone fifty Arbron
reported. <Three point three K. Three point feet off the ground.

four K. Hull temperature is . . . you don't even want We had been seven
miles up, right at the outer to know. Three point five K.>

edge of the Taxxon atmosphere. We dropped back Three thousand five
hundred miles an hour. The down to ground level in five point eight seconds.
ground was a blur. We were a blazing meteorite.

<Yaaaaahhhhhh!>

We were an arrow of flame as we shot across the

<Yaaaaahhhhhh!>

Taxxon world at impossible speeds. The scruffy We both screamed in a mix
of utter terror and bushes and stunted trees of the Taxxon world burst shocking
excitement. Let me tell you something: into flame as we passed over. We were
drawing a Millions of miles an hour in empty space is *nothing* line of fire around
the planet!

compared to three thousand miles an hour going

<Pull up!> Arbron yelled.

straight for the ground.

Mountains rose up like a wall. <Where did *they*

<Pull up! Pull up! Pull up!>

come from?!> I cried as I pulled up, straining every I pulled up, as the collision warnings screamed in atom in the Skrit Na ship.

the Skrit Na language.

The ship bucked like a dying beast in its final We blew across the Taxxon desert, trailing sonic agony. But we climbed. Up . . . up . .

booms that must have sounded like nuclear explo<Are we going to clear?> sions going off in our wake.

Before I could answer, we shot over the moun<Can you get the Bug fighters on visual?> I asked. tain wall. I swear I heard the bottom scrape as we

<On screen!>

cleared the height.

I saw two Bug fighters racing after us, one beUnfortunately, the Yeerks knew the local topoghind the other. Their hulls glowed bright with raphy. They'd been ready for them. They had friction heat. But they weren't backing off. adjusted easily and had gained on us.

<Fine,> I muttered. <Let's see who's faster.> I

TSSSSEEEWWWW!

raised the burn and felt a slight lurch as the engines A red Dracon beam lanced past us, missing by pushed harder still.

inches. They were close enough now to shoot. 128

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We were approaching the dividing line between hunger . . . Elfangor, you've felt it. You know. But I night and day. I could see it rushing toward me. can still make this shot.>

Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the

<You always laugh at *me* wanting to be a hero,> lead Bug fighter simply explode! The air friction had I said. <Now who's playing hero?>

finally worn down its compensators and the

He didn't answer.

craft had burned to a cinder in a split second. I looked at the hull temperature readout. He was

<Y a h - h a h ! One Yeerk f r i e d ! > I e x u l t e d . right. We would cinder in a few minutes.

<Elfangor, we're next if we don't slow down,> You know what's funny? I wanted to ask the

Arbron warned.

captain what to do. It seemed ridiculous that I

<There are still three Bug fighters on our tail,> I should make a life and death decision like this. said.

Princes made those kinds of decisions. Captains

<We are about five minutes away from burning made those decisions.

up,> Arbron said. <Can you guarantee those Bug Only I *was* the captain.

And if I was wrong, *we* fighters will cinder before we do?>

would dig a hole in the Taxxon dirt at three

<What do you have in mind?>

thousand miles an hour.

<We take a shot. One, two, three. They won't

<Okay, Arbron,> I said. <In ten seconds. Ten . . . be ready. They won't expect it.>

nine . . . eight . . . >

I turned my stalk eyes to stare at Arbron. <No one can make that shot.>

<I can,> he said.

<With Taxxon eyes?> I didn't want to throw that in his face, but I had to be realistic. <With Taxxon reaction times? With Skrit Na targeting computers?>

<I can make the shot, Elfangor,> he said calmly.

<Look, Arbron, I want to come out of this alive.>

<And you think I don't care if I live or die, right?> he said bitterly. <Maybe you're right. This 131

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chapter 20

Three shots at three targets doing a relative speed of fifteen hundred mph. Three shots in atmosphere! Three shots from a vibrating, bucking wreck of a Skrit Na ship.

I dragged myself up and stared in disbelief out of the forward window.

Three spinning meteorites, three balls of flame,

<**Three ... two ...**>

slammed into the ground. They dug craters in the I killed thrust and punched the air brakes. Taxxon dirt and extinguished themselves.

SHHHHHRRRRREEEEEEEEKKKK!

<Nice shooting!> I said. <Seriously nice shootThe Skrit Na ship shook; it bucked; it rattled; it ing!>

vibrated; it bounced wildly just fifty feet off the

<Thanks. It turns out Taxxon senses and reflexes grass.

are good at this kind of thing. Guess that's why the I was thrown off-balance. I sprawled across the Yeerks use Taxxon-Controllers to fly their Bug fightdeck. But Arbron's rows of Taxxon legs absorbed ers. It's nice to know there's something useful about the punishment. He never wavered. He kept his this disgusting body.>

Taxxon claws on the targeting controls.

<We're going to find a way to get you out of Our speed dropped from nearly three and a half that Taxxon morph,> I said. I tried to sound like I thousand miles per hour down to half that. In mere meant it. What else could I say?

seconds! Too fast for the Bug fighters to react. Till that moment I'd been too busy trying to stay What happened next would make Arbron a alive to really think about what had happened to hero.

A r b r o n . Maybe we'd never exactly been best Our speed dropped off; the Bug fighters rockfriends, but it was still horrible to look at his foul eted forward and blew past, doing fifteen hundred Taxxon body and think that this was how he would mph faster than us.

remain. To look into those emotionless red jelly Arbron fired! TSSSEEEEEWWW!

eyes and realize that he was in there, looking back Fired! TSSSEEEEEWWW!

at me.

Fired! TSSSEEEEEWWW!

And I knew what he was feeling, now that the 133

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battle was done. The terror. The despair. The awful hunger stop. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it! You fool, don't Taxxon hunger.

you know I could eat you right now?>

I turned the Skrit Na ship around and headed I turned my main eyes toward Arbron. I knew back toward the rushing line of daylight.

that inside there was a scared Andalite *aristh*. But

<What are you doing?> Arbron demanded. what I actually saw was the nightmare worm. What

<I need a place to land and conceal this ship,> I I saw was the sloppy red eyes, the round, gasping, said. <I need daylight. And I need to be closer to the

eternally hungry mouth.

spaceport. We can't just leave the others behind.> For a moment that seemed to stretch and

<Others? You mean Alloran?>

stretch, we stared at each other. I don't know what

<And the humans,> I said. <They are our rewas going through Arbron's mind right then. I don't sponsibility.>

know what conclusions he'd reached. I only know

<We are not going back to the spaceport,> Arwhat he did. bron said. <The Yeerks are back there. And Taxxons.

"Sssrrreeeeeyyyaaahhh!" he screamed in his They'll catch us. Do you know what they'll do if slithering, high-pitched Taxxon voice. He reared they catch me? They'll eat me alive, Elfangor.> back, practically laying the upper third of his body

<Arbron, you have to hold on. You have to try horizontal. And then he slammed down on me. and hold on.> We were racing back across the dark Slammed his upper body down, red mouth open mountains. Back toward the retreating line of wide.

daylight.

I could have killed him. He knew that, of course.

<Hold on? Hold on? Are you insane? If we go He knew that no Taxxon could hope to outfight an back there, they'll eat me! Turn this ship back. I'm Andalite. But I could not kill him. Not even if that's going to use the Time Matrix! I'm going back in what he wanted.

time. I'm going back to my life!>

I dodged to my right.

<You can't light up that Time Matrix. The power He slammed hard into the instrument panel.

signature will be visible to every ship in orbit, every Sparks erupted!

satellite, every —>

He swept his upper body toward me, hoping to

<I don't care! I don't care if I die, just let this slam me against the bulkhead and stun me.

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I leaped inside his reach and struck!

ate, Elfangor. I ate that wounded Taxxon. I couldn't SLASH! Two of his needle legs went rolling

help myself!>

across the floor.

<Shut up!> I screamed. <Shut up!> SLASH! And two more legs were gone.

I didn't want to hear anymore. I couldn't. I had Arbron sagged. The front part of his body could not focus. I had to land the ship or we'd both die. I no longer be held up. He lay, fully prone, a huge, had to shut Arbron up.

helpless worm.

I swept my stalk eyes around the bridge. Where

<Just kill me!> he screamed.

would the Skrit Na keep weapons? There. A green But I was busy. The control panel had been half panel marked with Skrit Na script. wrecked. The ship was bucking and yawing. It was I stretched my left arm to reach the panel. unstable. I reduced power. We had shot across the Popped it open. Yes. A handheld Dracon beam. Old line into twilight. But I couldn't see into the deep and dusty and probably badly maintained, like most shadows between the mountain peaks.

Skrit Na things.

<You can't leave me like this!> Arbron cried. I found the power setting. I set it at the lowest

<I'm going to get you help,> I yelled. <But I intensity. have to land this ship!>

<What are you doing?> Arbron yelled.

<Elfangor! You know what happens to wounded

<I have to land this ship, Arbron. Keep quiet or Taxxons! You *know*!>

I'll stun you.>

<I'll protect you,> I cried desperately as the ship

<If you fire that thing, you'll kill me,> Arbron bucked and shook harder and harder. The two cosaid. <You have the settings backward. That's origicooned Skrit seemed about to break loose from nally a Yeerk weapon. Setting one is the highest settheir moorings. The active Skrit had gone to the ting, not the lowest.>

cargo hold. Maybe, even as unintelligent as the Suddenly, I knew what Arbron would do. He

Skrit are, he knew better than to be anywhere couldn't rise up, but he could still scuttle forward. near a hungry Taxxon.

He came straight for me, rushing and slithering, as if

<You can't protect me. Fool! Nothing can stop he were aiming his round red mouth at me.

them! Nothing can stop the hunger. I couldn't stop He was trying to force me to shoot him. To shoot it. Alloran couldn't stop it. Don't you understand? I him with the Dracon beam set on maximum! But 137

chapter 21

I was too fast for him. I twisted the dial to ten. I fired.

And just as my finger was tightening on the trigger . . . I realized Arbron had outsmarted me. He'd lied, and I'd fallen for it. Arbron had always been a better student than me. He was a qualified exodatologist. He knew alien systems far better than me.

I woke up.

I tried to stop. But my finger squeezed. The DraI was on my side, lying in the dirt. con beam fired. On *maximum* power.

I looked up at a night sky. Stars, galaxies, three But by chance, or maybe by some desperate,

tiny moons.

too-late twitch of my finger, the beam missed Where was I?

Arbron by a millimeter.

I stood up. Every muscle in my body ached.

Instead, it blew a two-foot hole through the hull Muscles I didn't even know I had ached. My hooves of the ship.

tasted nothing but bare dirt. My stalk eyes swiveled After that, everything was noise and spinning quickly to look around, but I realized one eye was and pain and confusion.

blinded.

Then I saw the ship, the Skrit Na transport. It was still more or less in one piece. I must have been able to land it. Somehow. I couldn't remember much of those last few minutes. It was all chaos in my brain.

I forced myself to go over the facts. I was on the Taxxon home world. I was approximately four hundred miles from the spaceport. Loren and Chapman were in the hands of the Yeerks. Alloran . . . no one knew.

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Arbron had tried to trick me into killing him. looked like hundreds of rectangular sheets of paper That's what I remembered best.

glued together on one side; and a long crate of

<Arbron!> I called. <Arbron!>

what I could almost swear were primitive weapons. No answer. I trudged wearily over to the Skrit Na. All things that the Skrit Na had looted from ship. I saw the two-foot hole made by the Dracon Earth. Loren would know what they were, no doubt. beam. And then I saw the way the engines had. But in addition to all the small objects, there been ripped half off. The ship would never fly again. were two much larger things. One was a shiny yell I climbed into the wreckage. My second stalk low-painted creation with four black wheels. eye was starting to clear a little. I felt it and realized. The other object was the most powerful thing in it had just been covered with mud.

the history of the galaxy.

Inside the ship I called again. <Arbron!> I looked. It looked like nothing more than a smooth, offaround. Nothing was working except a tiny glimmer white sphere. It was perhaps ten feet in diameter. of emergency lighting. For some reason the Skrit Na. Perfectly smooth. Unmarked. You would never know. liked their emergency lighting to be green. Who what it was if you hadn't seen the power readings. knows why?

Invisible to the eye, it spread its grid down through. Something was missing. the very fabric of time-space.

Of course! The two Skrit cocoons. They must. The Time Matrix. have been knocked loose.

I found I had stopped breathing. I could barely. The door to the freight hold was blown open. I imagine the power I was staring at. To move a ship went in. The same green emergency lighting. illumiinto Zero-space took more power than a mediumnated a bizarre scene. In the hold were boxes and sized star. To move anything through time took ten crates piled in wild disarray. Many had broken open times that power. The power of ten suns. All someone impact. They spilled an amazing mass of alienhow contained in that off-white sphere. looking objects. Frozen, preserved animals; bundles

<Arbron!> I yelled.

of the artificial skin that Loren and Chapman wore; But I knew he wasn't there. He must have been glass objects that seemed to contain liquids; odd, thrown clear of the ship, just as I had been. Only I antiquated electronic equipment; small objects that hadn't seen him outside. And now it occurred to me

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that something else was missing, too. The active. There was human writing beneath the picture. I Skrit.

don't read human very well. But I was sure it was a. Both Skrit cocoons and the active Skrit were poem to the beauty revealed in the picture. gone. Along with Arbron.

The grass there looked sweet.

I turned slowly away from the Time Matrix. It would be a fine thing to run there. To run with had a hold over me. It drew my stalk eyes back to it, Loren and forget everything that had happened. even as I walked away.

Forget that I was alone on a planet of evil, my only I went back outside.
<Arbron!>

companion probably dead, my prince lost.

The light of the moons and stars was too dim to I turned to other pictures. I saw small, strange see clearly. But I had the impression I was in a narpictures of humans doing nothing but smiling. And row valley between tall, almost clifflike mountains. there were pictures of human technology. A flying Where could Arbron have gotten to? Had he fallen machine of some sort. Humans holding long rods from the doomed Skrit Na ship earlier? He could that spit fire. What seemed to be hideous cities. And have ended up slamming into one of the mountainthen, to my delight, a picture of an actual human sides.

spacecraft.

I hated to even imagine that.

It took me a few seconds to understand what it I went back inside the cargo hold and picked up was. It seemed to be a chemical rocket. An actual a handful of paper sheaves. Some were larger and chemical rocket!

had pictures. By the dim green light I instantly recBut the pictures that drew my gaze were the ognized that the pictures were of humans.

ones of beautiful beaches beside blue seas. And I flipped through pictures of humans doing

mountains topped with white. And rushing

things I could not understand. But then there white-water streams surrounded by tall green trees. was one picture I understood immediately. It The trees were all very similar. Not as beautiful as showed a marvelously tall waterfall. The waterfall the trees I knew. Still, the pictures spoke of a lovely crashed into a pool surrounded by trees, all of them world, filled with delicious green grass and cool green. Overhead was a blue sky.

water.

Two humans were smiling and sticking tiny

That alien landscape of Earth took me away

white cylinders into their mouths.

from the drab horror of the Taxxon world. I won142

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dered if Chapman might be from the jagged human conscious. They had to have seen me, smelled me. cities. Was that why he was so much harsher than And yet I was still alive.

Loren? Was Loren from the beautiful green country

<They have Arbron,> I realized.

where smiling humans stuck white cylinders in their I reeled back and fell down. The Taxxons had mouths?

taken Arbron. I knew what Taxxons did with prisI guess I fell asleep looking at that picture. I oners.

awoke with lingering traces of awful dreams chas<No!> What had I done? I'd let them take Aring through my brain. bron alive!

There was light . . . natural light from the TaxAnd yet why hadn't they taken me? And the xon sun.

Time Matrix? Surely Taxxon-Controllers would not I ran outside. As I had guessed, I was in an inhive done that. credibly steep valley. And now I could see tracks in I recalled Sub-Visser Seven's reference to Mounthe orange dirt. The marks of dozens of needletain Taxxons Taxxons who refused to submit to sharp legs. Taxxon tracks!

Yeerk control. And I felt just the faintest glimmer of The tracks came right up to the ship. Had they hope. If these had been Yeerk-controlled Taxxons, come while I was asleep? No. I could see my own they'd have taken the Time Matrix. And me.

tracks from the night before. My tracks were over

<What am I supposed to do now?> I asked the the Taxxon tracks.

empty, dusty sky.

Arbron! They were his tracks. Had to be. And Should I try to follow the tracks to Arbron? No. I yet . . . No, there had been more than one Taxxon. had to be logical. Whatever type of Taxxon he'd Three . . . four others. Five sets altogether. fallen in with, their hunger would almost certainly And then I saw two additional signs. A set of seal his doom. And the doom of the poor Skrit Na, wandering, insectlike tracks, and the evidence of too.

something large being dragged away.

Alloran might still be alive. He was my prince.

<The Skrit,> I said. <Okay. So Taxxons came. My duty was to get back to him. Tell him about the They took Arbron away. And the Skrit. And maybe Time Matrix and Arbron. Somehow. But the Taxxon the two cocooned Skrit.>

spaceport was hundreds of miles away, across burnI glanced at the spot where I'd been lying uning sands. 144

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Then . . . one of the human pictures I'd seen The noise was amazing!

came back to me. It had shown two smiling humans It was an actual chemical engine! Something sitting in something very much like the bright

yellow from a thousand years ago! Ridiculously primitive, machine in the cargo hold.

and yet I found when I pressed my forehoof on a I went back to the ship. Yes, this bright yellow pedal in the floor, the engine roared.
machine had four wheels. And you could easily see

VVVRRRRRROOOOM! VVVRRROOOOOM!

how humans might sit in it. It had a name in chrome V V V R O O O O O O M !

letters: "Mustang." Naturally, I had no idea what It was primitive, all right. But it vibrated in a most that meant.
satisfying way. And I liked it.

I set to work enlarging the hole in the side of the cargo hold. Then I removed the chairs in the machine. I discovered that I could fit inside the machine if I removed the flimsy cloth top. I stared long and hard at the control panel. The computer was tiny and had knobs you could twist. But at first all it did was make static noises. Then I discovered an actual tape drive! Astoundingly primitive. I pushed the buttons on the small keypad and twisted the knobs again, and to my utter amazement, the computer began to play music.

"I can't get no . . . satisfaction!" it screamed. I quickly turned it down. What kind of race would use a computer to play screaming sounds?

It took twenty minutes more for me to realize that a notched brass insert could be twisted. And when I twisted it ..

RRRRR RRRRRR RRRRRRRRR PUH PUH PUH

VROOOOM!

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chapter 22

how to open them. After that, I quickly determined, that they contained water-based liquids. I poured, the liquids into a shallow pan, and was able to stick in one hoof to drink as I drove.

DR. PEPPER, the bottles had said. I figured that was human writing for "bubbling brown water." For a while I just put Arbron out of my mind. I **I have run mag-hover trucks.**

put Alloran out of my mind. And I pictured myself I have flown Bug fighters.

with Loren, driving in my Mustang across the green I have flown Skrit Na raiders at three thousand grass of Earth. Wind in my face. Bubbling brown miles per hour *in atmosphere.*

water running up my hoof.

But I had never experienced anything more exAs I drove, I tried to come up with a plan. One hilarating than racing down the valley and out thing was for sure: An Andalite in a Mustang was across the open Taxxon desert in my Mustang. It going to be just slightly obvious. I would need only went a hundred miles per hour, but with the stealth. But I would not morph to Taxxon again. wind in your face, whipping your fur, bending your Not ever.

stalk eyes back, it was certainly a wild ride. That's when the ground beneath my wheels simBut everything was going wrong. ply opened up.

I was racing across the Taxxon desert in a human

FFFFWWUUMPPP!

vehicle toward probable doom. But with the wind in

<Aaaaahhhh!>

my face, and the music in my ears mingling with the

BOOM! BOOM! RUMBLERUMBLERUMBLE!

loud roar of the engine, I didn't feel so badly. The Mustang tumbled and rattled down a steep, I had gathered up some of the other human obrough slope. A dirt ramp that led straight down into jects the Skrit Na had taken. The writing sheets with darkness.

pictures. Some of the machines that looked like

<Aaaaahhhh!>

weapons. And some of the glass bottles containing I took my hoof off the accelerator pedal. I tried liquid.

to reach the key to turn off the engine. But the viI broke several of the bottles before I figured out bration was too severe.

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I slid and rattled and rolled in my human maAs a Taxxon!

chine, down, down, down into the ground. Down I saw them then. My eyes finally pierced the and down. And then I slid to a halt. darkness and saw the Taxxons! Dozens . . . no,

SCRRUUMPPFFF!

hundreds! They swarmed around and over the
The only sound was the noise of the engine and glowing red mountain.
the weird human moaning that passed for music. As I watched, I saw holes open in the sides of the

. . . gimme, gimme, gimme the honky-tonk
tunnel-tendrils. Out crawled more Taxxons.
blues!"

They had to see me. They couldn't help but see I turned off the music.
me. And yet none moved to attack me.

I was in darkness, but not the absolute darkness I Instead, they busied themselves pushing dirt and expected. This darkness still afforded sight. There rock back into place to fill the space my Mustang was light enough for my main eyes to see,

had created.

after they'd had a few seconds to adjust.

<IS THIS THE CREATURE?>

I was in a vast underground cavern. Dominating

<Aaaarrrrggghh!> I screamed.

the center of the cavern was a sort of hill or small The voice in my head was huge! Massive! I

mountain. It was this mountain that glowed. It grabbed my head with my hands. It was like hearing glowed a dim but unmistakable red.

a planet speak! It was only then, as I staggered unFrom this irregular glowing hill came tendrils, der the psychic blow, that I realized it: The red each perhaps three or four feet in diameter. As my mountain was alive!

eyes adjusted I could see that there were a dozen or I heard a different thought-speak voice. <Yes. more of these tendrils, and that each one extended That's him,> Arbron said. <He is called Elfangor.> to the edge of the cavern and then kept going into One Taxxon came slithering toward me out of the rock itself.

the mass of bodies around the base of the red The tendrils, too, glowed a dim red. I realized mountain. It moved clumsily. Two rows of legs were that I could see things moving inside the tendrils. shorter than the others.

The tendrils were hollow! They were tubes, each

<Arbron?>

about as big around as ..

<Yes, Elfangor. It's me.>

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<I was afraid you were dead,> I said.

<The legs I . . . the legs you were missing.

<I wanted to be. But I am still alive. Alive to They're growing back.>
serve the Living Hive.>

<Yes. Taxxons can regenerate legs.>

<The what?>

<Arbron . what's going on? It wasn't an acciHe waved one Taxxon claw back toward the dent that the ground opened up beneath me. Did massive, glowing mountain. <The Living Hive. Light the . . . the Living Hive want me here for some of the Taxxons. Mother and Father of the Taxxons. reason?>

The Hive has lost many of its children to the Yeerks.

<Yes, Elfangor. The Hive is angry.>

Many of its servants have betrayed the Hive and

<At me?> I asked, feeling my guts turn over sevmade an alliance with the Yeerks. But the Living eral times. If this glowing red mountain was mad at Hive is still the Mother and Father of the species.> me, all it had to do was yell in its monstrous psychic

<Arbron, what are you talking about? Have they voice and I'd be shattered.
done something to you?>

<The Living Hive is tired of losing its children to Then he laughed — the old Arbron again, for the Yeerks. The Living Hive has long sought a way just a moment. <Have they done something to me?

to destroy the Yeerk invaders and remove them Well, they didn't eat me, if that's what you mean. from this planet. But the Hive could not understand The Taxxons who found us after we crashed wanted the Yeerks and their machines. Now . . . now, the to eat us both. But I gave them the Skrit instead. I Hive has an adviser. Someone who understands mahad no choice! And then the Living Hive learned chines, spaceships, Dracon beams. Someone who what I was. It drew me here.>

will help the Hive destroy the Yeerks and their traitor

<We're hundreds of miles from where we

Taxxons.>

landed. How did you get here? You couldn't possiI stared at Arbron. <You?>
bly have walked.>

He laughed. But this time there was no mirth.

<The Living Hive's tunnels extend across thou<What better future could I have, Elfangor? I am sands of miles, Elfangor. There is suction in the tunTaxxon now. And now I am preparing for a surprise nels. A Taxxon has only to fold back its legs, and the attack on the spaceport. The Hive will send a thoupessure draws it swiftly down the tunnel, as the sand of her children with me. I will lead a Taxxon Hive commands.>

rebellion.>

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I didn't say anything. What was there to say?

were no less cannibalistic. No less murderous. And My hearts were breaking. yet, if they opposed the Yeerks, could I refuse to ofArbron slithered closer, shuffling on his needlefer that help?

like legs. He looked at me through red jelly eyes.

<Tell me what I can do to help, Arbron.> And even now, I knew he seethed with raging

<That's more like it, Elfangor. We'll put some tail Taxxon hunger.

blades into these Yeerks, right? Right? We'll be he<Don't pity me, Elfangor. I am glad I didn't die. roes, after all.>

Any life is better than none. And no matter how awful things seem, there is always meaning and purpose to be found.>

<And you've found your purpose?>

<We attack tonight. The Living Hive is pushing her tunnels closer to the spaceport. A thousand Taxxons will pour from the ground, surprising the Yeerks and all their creatures.>

I imagined that moment. A thousand huge,

hungry worms, erupting amid the technological cathedrals of the ship's cradles. Erupting amidst Taxxon-Controllers and Hork-Bajir-Controllers.

<You'll lose,> I said.

<We know,> Arbron said. <But even a Taxxon has the right to control its own planet. Even a Taxxon has the right to resist an invader.>

<But you can't win,> I said flatly.

<Aren't lost causes sometimes the best causes, Elfangor?>

How could he imagine that anything to do with Taxxons could ever be a good cause? These Taxxon 155

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chapter 23

The Living Hive is no more safe from the Time Matrix than any other living thing.>

<I'll take care of the Time Matrix,> I said.

<You'll need to take the *Jahar*. I'll help get you to it.>

<And then you can leave with me,> I said.

<No, Elfangor. I'm staying here. We'll lose this All that afternoon I stayed in the horrible, reekbattle. But there may be other chances to hurt the ing, stifling darkness of that underground cavern. Yeerks.>

Arbron was there some of the time. But not often. I didn't know what to say. I guess I felt like only Mostly he was communing with the Living Hive. Arbron could decide for Arbron now. <I'll . . . I'll tell Making plans.

your parents what —>

Arbron had become a general. He was just what

<No!> he said sharply. <No, Elfangor. Tell them I the Living Hive needed. He could explain what the died in battle. Let them remember me the way I Taxxons would find when they erupted into the used to be, okay? I don't want them to remember spaceport. He could explain how to hurt the Yeerks. me like this. I don't want them picturing me this I don't know if he told the Hive how hopeless way.>

the task was. I only know that he seemed very alive.

<Arbron . .> I said, my mind swimming in emoAlmost on fire. tion.

At last, he came to me. <Elfangor. There is a del<I have some last-minute planning. We've put icate problem we have to discuss. Alloran and the that yellow machine of yours in one of the tubes. humans. You know what this will be like. Taxxon You'll go last, after all our people have been sent. against Taxxon-Controller. Taxxon against

Drive straight down the tunnel. The tunnel is part of HorkBajir. No one will be safe. From either side.> the Hive. It will make sure you get to the right place.

<What do you want me to do?>

And one last thing . . .>

<If you can, find Alloran and the humans. I

<Yes?>

know that's what you'd want to do, anyway. But
<The spaceport will be hell,> he said flatly. <You most importantly, get the
Time Matrix safely away. won't be able to tell the difference between my 156
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Taxxons and Taxxon-Controllers. So don't hesitate. face of the Taxxon
world. On my way to a
Do what you have to.>
massacre.
And then he left. The legs I had cut off were half And then ..
grown back. But I could still recognize him, moving

FWOOOOOSH!

amongst the other Taxxons.
I shot into the air.
The launch of the attack was eerie to watch. RrrrrrEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE! The
engine screamed as the Taxxons lined up alongside the tunnels. The Living
wheels spun madly in midair.
Hive glowed a brighter red, and swiftly, smoothly, I burst from the ground,
flew through the air, the Taxxons shoved through the slits in the tunnels and saw,
in flashes of explosion and Dracon-beam and were blown down the tubes.
blast, a scene no madman could have dreamed. They were launched at a rate
of one every eight The machine arced toward the ground.
seconds or so, down five separate tubes. It took alWHUUUUUMPPPPFF!
most half an hour for all the Taxxons to enter the The front wheels hit, the
engine roared, I was tubes. And then it was my turn.
banged so badly that my elbow and left foreleg I nosed the yellow Mustang
into the living, pulwere scraped bloody, and the Mustang dug in and sating gap in
the tube. To my amazement, the tube hauled away in an explosion of kicked-up
dirt. stretched for me and the machine. It flattened down Suddenly, a Taxxon right
in front of me!
and widened out, leaving just inches of clearance.

SPLOOOMMMP!

I felt the WHOOOOOSH! of air pressure.
The machine slammed into the Taxxon and burst It blew me down the tube. I
gunned the engine and it open like a bag of garbage!
went from zero to two hundred miles per hour in
<Aaaahhhh!> I screamed in sheer horror. seconds!

But it was only one small piece of horror in a There was nothing exhilarating about this. I was scene that will be burned on my brain forever. blasting down a living tunnel, enclosed on all sides, Taxxon cries!

Hork-Bajir roars!

ducking my head to avoid having my stalk eyes The TSEEEWW TSEEEWW! of Dracon beams!

scraped off. The only light came from the machine's Scenes of nauseating violence were everywhere!

own lights — white, looking ahead, red, looking back. The battle had already raged for half an hour. Half For long minutes I raced along beneath the sur159

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an hour of unarmed Taxxons against bladed HorkStanding alone on the ramp was a single Taxxon. Bajir.

A single Taxxon with four legs shorter than the rest. It was a slaughterhouse.

<Arbron!> I screamed, as I slammed the MusHow was I supposed to find the humans amidst tang into the mass of ravening Taxxons.

that awful battle? How was I even supposed to

<Elfangor! I can't hold them any longer!> think?

<Are these Taxxon-Controllers? Or are they A huge Hork-Bajir spotted me and began to run your soldiers?>

for the Mustang. Only when he got close did he cry

<There's no difference anymore, Elfangor! Don't

"Andalite!" in surprise and greedy delight. you see? Blood has been spilled. The hunger . . . the He leaped at the moving machine. I spun the hunger! Stop me, Elfangor! Stop me!>

steering wheel. The Mustang turned sharply. I And with that, Arbron, *aristh* of the Dome ship gunned the engine! WHUUMPF! I hit the Hork-Bajir *StarSword*, lost his last shred of control. He turned in the legs. He cartwheeled over my head and from facing down the Taxxon mob. He turned and landed in the dirt behind me.

ran for the humans, mouth gaping open.

Taxxons! Hork-Bajir! Gedds! All around me! I used the Mustang like a battering ram, mowing down anyone in my way.

The *Jahar*. All I could do was head for the *Jahar*!

The lovely ship stood proud above the slaughter. And there, atop the ship's cradle, clearly silhouetted by the lights, were two strange, alien shapes. Two aliens that walked on two legs alone, without tail. The humans!

Seething around the base of the ship's cradle were a hundred Taxxons. All pushing and shoving to squeeze up the narrow ramp that led to the ship itself.

chapter 24

Behind me, I saw the Taxxons falling back. And over them climbed and leaped a handful of HorkBajir warriors. Seven feet tall. Blades on their wrists and elbows and knees. Blade horns raked forward from their sleek snake heads. Short, spiked tails twitching. Ripping bird feet clawing at Taxxon flesh to

<N000000!> **I screamed.** I leapt from the maadvance. chine and plowed into the mass of Taxxon bodies. I realized I knew one of the Hork-Bajir. It was My tail whipped the air!

Sub-Visser Seven.

Strike! And push through.

"A h , so we meet again, Andalite!" he said, Strike! And push through.

sounding delighted. "Elfangor, right? That was the Strike! Strike! Strikestrikestrike!

name you yelled so defiantly at me as you escaped. I I reached the ramp and leaped clear over the was so afraid the Taxxons might have gotten to you last Taxxon in my way. <Loren! R u n ! Arbron!

by now. And I so wanted you all for myself!" **N000000!>**

For a moment no one m o v e d . The injured I raced up the ramp. Arbron was closing in on Taxxons withdrew down the ramp to make way for the humans. the Hork-Bajir.

The human Chapman was free. And it was toI was alone against half a dozen Hork-Bajir. Beward him that Arbron ran. The human Chapman hind me, Arbron, who still eyed Loren hungrily. And screamed.

with them, Chapman. Whose side was Chapman on Arbron reared back, ready to slam his upper now? And whose side was Arbron on?

body down on the frail human.

"Surrender, Elfangor," Sub-Visser Seven practi<Aristh Arbron!> I cried. <Aristh Arbron, you cally purred. "I won't kill you. I'll just . . . use you. will stop! You will do your duty!>

I'll leave this crude body and live inside your head. I don't know what made me say that. I don't I'll wrap myself around your smug, arrogant Anknow. I only know that Arbron hesitated. As Chapdalite brain and make you my slave. And with your man cowered, helpless, Arbron remained poised. Andalite morphing power, run the galaxy before 162

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I'm done! It's either that or death, Andalite. There's railing and leaped onto the platform to our right. no third choice."

And the wounded Hork-Bajir was still dangerous. I saw Arbron turn away from Loren. He came to The odds were getting worse very quickly. More stand beside me, a massive, ten-foot-long worm. Hork-Bajir were cramming onto the ramp, anxious

<Guess we're a long way from the good old Starto serve their sub-visser. Sword, eh, Elfangor?> he said, with a touch of his Battle exploded suddenly in rapid thrusts and old humor. <We are one lost, lonely pair of arisths. slashes. Hork-Bajir blades made the air sing as they Tell the Yeerk scum to dream on, Elfangor. Tell him whipped their powerful arms and legs at me. Arbron we are Andalites. We don't surrender.>

did what he could, but a Taxxon is helpless in a

<You heard my friend, Sub-Visser Seven,> I said. blade fight. The Hork-Bajir just climbed over him to

<You want me? Come get me.>

reach me.

In the great stories and legends, that kind of

"Elfangor! Look out!" Loren screamed. speech always scares the bad guys. In real life it

"Get h i m ! What are you waiting for?" Subdoesn't work that way. Visser Seven roared. "He's just one Andalite!"

"Okay," Sub-Visser Seven said. "I will come get I fell back under the pressure. I had no time to you. Cut him down! Cut him down!" he screamed think. None. Only time to react. Only time to block in sudden rage.

deadly blows. I had been cut badly already, and it His Hork-Bajir leaped for me. But the ramp was was only a matter of time.

narrow. There was only room for two Hork-Bajir at a And then a new Hork-Bajir stepped forward.

time. Any trained Andalite can handle a Hork-Bajir

<So, how are you enjoying the war, Aristh Elfanone-on-one. They're fast. We're faster. gor?> he asked in Andalite thought-speak. SWOOOOOOSH! The first Hork-Bajir

I was so stunned I almost missed the next blow. swung his wrist blade.

War-prince Alloran! In Hork-Bajir morph!

FWAAAPPPP! I struck with my tail, and he no Alloran spun. Before the sub-visser could so longer had a wrist blade. Or a wrist.

much as twitch, Alloran had pressed his wrist blade But the second Hork-Bajir shoved past him and against the Yeerk's throat.

got to my left. One of his comrades swung over the

<Don't move, Yeerk. Don't even breathe,> Allo165

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ran said. <Call off your men. Do it, or I'll laugh

<I was there. My name is Alloran-Semiturwhen your head goes rolling across the ground.> Corrass. War-prince Alloran.>

"Hold!" the sub-visser cried. "Back away!" For the first time, the sub-visser seemed afraid. The Hork-Bajir obeyed. They backed away. I

His mocking, arrogant attitude seemed to

panted and gasped for air. I was exhausted. I was evaporate. He quickly ordered his Hork-Bajir bleeding. Loren ran over and pressed her hands down the ramp.

against a deep gash in my chest. The pressure Together we backed carefully toward the *Jahar*. slowed the loss of blood.

Alloran, with the Yeerk sub-visser in his steel grip;

"You're still alive!" she said. "I was so worried." Loren, still tending my wound; and Chapman, the

<Now here's what we're going to do,> Alloran treacherous human who had led us all to this terrible said. <The two humans and my two friends and I mess.

are going aboard the *Jahar*. And you, Sub-Visser, Only Arbron turned away from the open hatch are coming with us. Once we're off the cradle, we'll of the *Jahar*.

toss you back out. How does that plan sound to

<Come with us, Arbron,> I said. <Look around. you, Yeerk?> he demanded, tightening his hold on The free Taxxons have lost. The Living Hive will be the sub-visser.

destroyed. There's no future for you here.>

"Do I have a choice?"

<Elfangor, there's no future for me anywhere.>

<There's always a choice, Yeerk. I can cut you

<But you can't,> I said. <Who's going to remind right out of that Hork-Bajir and feed your impotent me not to be so stiff? Who's going to laugh at me slug body to my friend the Taxxon here. That's one when I start talking about being a great prince?> choice. Or you can order your men back down the

<You go, Elfangor,> Arbron said gently. <Go ramp. All the way down.>

save the galaxy.>

"Whatever became of the Andalite reputation

<Leave him,> Alloran said. <*Aristh* . . . I mean, for kindness and gentleness?" the Yeerk mocked. *Warrior* Arbron is a casualty of war.>

<What happened? We left that image in the ashes of the Hork-Bajir home world.>

"You were there?"

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you want orders. Now you *want* to be told what to do.>

I was too tired to be angry. I was even too tired to consider how my earlier refusal to follow orders would probably destroy my career. What was I going to do? Explain to some military tribunal that I, the insignificant *aristh*, had thought Alloran's order **We launched the Jahar**. There was no one to immoral?

stop us. The battle still raged, and none of the

<Sir, the Time Matrix is —>

Yeerks had the presence of mind to come after us.

<Silence, you young fool!> Alloran snapped anOr so I thought. grily. He glared at me, enraged. <We don't have Alloran demorphed from his Hork-Bajir body. I time for that yet. No, first we have to take care of was relieved. I guess he saw my expression. the business you kept me from taking care of. That

<Did you think I had ended up like Arbron back Taxxon ship full of Yeerks is still in its cradle. Still filled there? Trapped? A *nothlit*? No, *Aristh* Elfangor. I am with Yeerk slugs. What do you think I've been doing still myself.>

the last day and a half? I've been hiding in shadows,

<I'm glad, sir,> I said.

morphing and demorphing, watching that ship.> Sub-Visser Seven stood in a corner, eyeing Allo<Prince Alloran, is that really the most important ran as he demorphed and resumed his usual

thing to do?>

Andalite body. Loren seemed dazed. Even

For the first time since he had demorphed, he Chapman seemed unusually quiet. No doubt he was turned to face me. He glared at me with his main afraid of what we would do to him.

eyes. And that's when I saw the look. That's when I He deserved *whatever* we did to him. saw the rage. The mad rage.

<Your orders, sir?> I asked the prince.

<The most important thing in war is to destroy Alloran sneered. <Ah. Now you want orders. your enemies, *Aristh* Elfangor. Nothing is more i When I ordered you to flush those pools full of mportant than destroying your enemies. Do you Yeerks out into space you disobeyed me. But now understand?>

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He turned his stalk eyes toward the sub-visser. I opened the hatch. Warm Taxxon air blew in,

<You understand, don't you? You Yeerks understrange in the enclosed environment. It ruffled stand.>

Loren's golden hair.

"You said you would let me go!" the sub-visser

<Get out, Yeerk,> Alloran said to Sub-Visser cried.

Seven.

<And so I will,> Alloran said. <Open the hatch, I closed my main eyes. I kept my stalk eyes fo *Aristh* Elfangor. The sub-visser is going to see if cused on my instruments. I could not look.

that Hork-Bajir body of his can fly!>

<Close the hatch,> Alloran said a few seconds The sub-visser tensed up. He was not going to later.

get pushed out of a spaceship without a fight. His I dared to look. The sub-visser was gone. I Hork-Bajir muscles bunched and rippled.

looked down at the exterior display screens. A tiny He seemed to glance at C h a p m a n . And I figure fell through the clouds. I looked away. swear . . . but, no, I had to be imagining things. It's

<Now we go back and fry that transport ship,> just that Chapman seemed to shake his head, Alloran said briskly. <Good to see you've grown up almost invisibly.

a little, *Aristh* Elfangor. Take us back over the The sub-visser's face glazed over. His eyes went southeastern corner of the spaceport. Maintain dead. He relaxed his muscles.

present altitude. Then we'll go pick up our

<Slow to dead stop,> Alloran ordered. <Altimissing Time Matrix, eh?> tude?>

He seemed cheerful. As if, for a moment at least,

<Fifteen thousand feet,> I said dully. <We are the madness were past. But I knew it wasn't over. still within the atmosphere. Air speed is now at dead We didn't need to destroy the Yeerks in those transstop.> port pools. We needed to secure the Time Matrix.

<Dead stop,> Alloran said. <Appropriate. Now But I had given up arguing. I was tired. I was open the hatch.>

scared. I was sick from thinking of Arbron. I wanted What could I do? I was just an *aristh*. I had alto sleep and sleep and sleep, and not wake up till I ready defied Alloran once. If I defied him again. . . was home on my own grass, under my own trees. He was mad. Insane.

I saw Loren watching me. She seemed worried. C

What could I do?

oncerned. Who wouldn't be? And yet .

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Chapman was watching, too. He seemed tense. But we could also see platoons of Hork-Bajir roundUnderstandable. And yet .. . ing up Taxxons. And other Taxxons were busily

<What made you decide to come with us?> I feeding ..

asked Chapman. <Do you expect mercy from us?

Somewhere down there was Arbron.

You betrayed us. You betrayed your fellow human. Alloran aimed the shredder. He aimed it careYou've told the Yeerks about Earth. You may have fully, taking his time. He focused it on the transport betrayed your entire species.>

ship that contained thousands of helpless Yeerk He shrugged. "Not my fault, though, is it? I was slugs.

on Earth, minding my own business. I didn't ask to

<Fire, *Aristh* Elfangor,> he said. be kidnapped by the Skrit Na. I didn't ask to be

<Wh at?>

dragged halfway across the galaxy by you

<I said fire. Fry those Yeerks. You let them live, Andalites. I was just trying to protect myself." now you finish them. Undo your mistake, and no

<By making deals with the Yeerks?> Alloran one will ever have to know about your earlier cowl laughed. <The Yeerks don't make deals. They enardice.> slave.>

My finger reached for the firing pad.

"Yeah, I guess that's what I realized. After a

<Do it, Elfangor,> Alloran hissed.

while," Chapman said. "Look, I'm sorry, okay? I'm just a dumb human kid, okay? Give me a break."

<We are coming back over the spaceport,> I announced. <There is a lot of smoke. But you should still be able to get a good targeting lock with the shredder.>

Alloran didn't answer. He just stared at the display screen. At full magnification we could see the wormlike Taxxons below. We could easily see the ships, some burning from the battle, some tilted wildly over.

The Living Hive had done damage to the Yeerks. 173

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<War-prince Alloran, I honor you, but —> <What is the difference how you destroy the enemy?> Alloran demanded.

I had no idea what he was talking about anymore. He was off somewhere in his own head. Lost in his own memories.

<What does it matter if you kill them with a tail **My finger hovered above the pad.** It was war. In blade or a shredder or a quantum virus?> war, you destroyed your enemies. Alloran was my Quantum virus? No. No. Even after all the horror prince. You obeyed your prince.

I had seen, I was shocked.

But ten thousand defenseless Yeerks? With one

<You . . . you used a quantum virus? You used a movement of my finger? quantum virus on the Hork-Bajir world?>

No.

A quantum virus is a sort of disease of spaceI pulled my hand away, and in a blur of motion I time. You see, it slowly breaks down the force that felt Alloran's tail blade press against my throat. holds subatomic particles together. It slowly disinte<You think you can fight a clean war, Elfangor? Is grates whatever it affects. Living creatures affected that what you think? Or are you one of those who with a quantum virus find their very molecules are happy enough when someone like me does the breaking down. It can take days, weeks of agony. dirty work for you?>

That was Alloran's secret. That was his disgrace.

<They are defenseless,> I said as calmly as I The Yeerks had accused us of using a quantum virus could.

against them. We had denied it. Every Andalite be<They are the enemy. Hypocrites! You're all hyplieved it was just another filthy Yeerk lie. ocrites! We lost the Hork-Bajir war because of weak, Alloran stared at me. <I cannot have a weak, moralizing fools like you! Because of fools like you, I cowardly fool like you messing up —>

am disgraced and shunned and sent off on trivial erI saw it out of the corner of my stalk eyes. A sudrands with nothing but *arisths* under my den m o v e m e n t . Not f a s t , but u n e x p e c t e d . command.>

Chapman!

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He leaped at Alloran and swung one of his on my chest wound. It had begun to scab over but strong human hands. With tightly clenched fingers the exertion of knocking Alloran out had opened he hit Alloran on the side of his head.

the wound again. She tore a strip of fabric from the Alloran's head snapped back. More in surprise bottom of one of her artificial skins. She tied it than pain. But it was enough. I swung my tail hard around my chest to protect the wound.

and fast. I turned the blade away and slammed

<Thank you,> I said.

Alloran's head with every ounce of power I had.

"Is life always this insane for you space cadets?" He dropped like a stone. He collapsed to the

<Oh, yes,> I said bitterly. <Infiltrate the Taxxon deck in a heap. And I saw triumph on Chapman's home world, help inspire a Taxxon civil war, mutiny face. Triumph.

against my prince, and locate the Time Matrix, all in I should have known then. I should have realthe company of a pair of strange, two-legged ized.

aliens. . . . Business as usual.>

Instead, I went to the medical kit and with shaking I was busy watching the ground below, looking hands pulled out a tranquilizer hypo. I emptied it into for the place where I had crashed the Skrit Na ship. my mad prince. It would keep him down for hours. But I saw Loren's smile.

"Now what?" Chapman demanded.

"Hey. You made a joke. I didn't think you did

<Now what?!> I shrieked. <Now what? I just humor, Elfangor."

knocked out my own prince!> I was sick. Sick down to

<When the world goes mad, what else can you my bones. But there was no one else to turn to. No do?> I thought of Arbron. Still making little jokes, one else to make decisions. As stupid as I had been, even when his life was a wreck. <I wonder if Arbron it was still up to me.

knew the world was mad?>

<We have something to pick up,> I said, forcing Loren just looked sad. But then she forced a calm into my thought-speak voice. <Then we are smile again. "Speaking of crazy . . . did I see you getting as far from this evil place as this ship will driving up in a bright yellow Mustang back there?" go!>

<It was a wonderful machine. Primitive, but Chapman nodded, as if satisfied.

strangely enjoyable.>

Loren came over. She put her soft human hand I cut thrust and peered closely into the screen.

<There it is. We're going down. I need to clear away 176

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Time Matrix. And I knew what I would see when I the wreckage so the tractor beam can grab the Time Matrix.>

walked back around that off-white globe.

Trembling with despair and exhaustion, I set the I landed the *Jahar* in the narrow valley, a few feet away from the wreckage of the Skrit Na ship. I shredder for its next to lowest setting. I would have grabbed a handheld shredder, opened the hatch, to duplicate Arbron's feat: three quick shots. Yes. and hurried outside.

Three.

It took several minutes to burn away the wreckI sucked in deep breaths, and then I bolted at top speed.

age of the Skrit Na ship and reveal the Time Matrix. It was for this that so much horror had occurred. I leaped from behind the Time Matrix.

Loren, raising a Dracon beam in her hand!

For this most powerful of all weapons.

It sat there amidst the wreckage, so harmlessI fired!

looking. if the Yeerks had known this was here, they She dropped, twitching wildly from the energy would have stopped at nothing to get it.

pulse.

It was lucky Loren never told them while they

TSSSEEEWWWW!

held her captive. Lucky that Chapman never told Chapman fired! But he was weak and shaky

them.

from what he had just endured.

Lucky.

I fired! The human dropped to the dirt.

And lucky that I had been able to hold off the But there was one more left. I knew it. I knew, Hork-Bajir. And lucky that we had been able to get and I knew that I had very little time.

away from the spaceport without being pursued. Sudden movement! I spun and fired! Missed!

More luck.

No, not a complete miss. I had stunned his right Too much luck.

arm. The hand holding the Dracon beam dropped, I really was a fool. I felt a cold shiver crawl up my useless.

spine.

He stood there, rage on his face. Alloran. WarI was behind the Time Matrix, hidden from the prince Alloran-Sematur-Corrass.

Jahar. And suddenly, I knew what was happening But not really Alloran anymore.

back inside the *Jahar* while I worked to free the For the rest of my life I would remember that 179

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moment. The moment when I looked for the first time, upon the abomination.

You see, Alloran was no longer Alloran.

<Very good, *Aristh* Elfangor. It took you a while, but you figured it out in the end.>

<Sub-Visser Seven,> I said.

<Yes, but not for long. The Yeerk who made the first Andalite-Controller? The Yeerk who captured I raised my shredder and pointed it at Allothe fabled Time Matrix? I'd say I can count on a maran . . . no, at Sub-Visser Seven. jor promotion. Wouldn't you?>

<You made Chapman a Controller. You were in his head. That Hork-Bajir I thought was you . . . just a trick.>

<Of course. And another of my people made Loren one of us,> he sneered. <And while you so considerately worked to clear away the Time Matrix, I revived Alloran and transferred myself into him. The first and only Andalite-Controller! It was so kind of you to knock the old warrior out for me. I didn't know how I was ever going to take him. He was a wily creature. A bit mad, of

course, but he knew war. You saw how ruthless he was in tossing out the poor Hork-Bajir who played the role of me. Yes, Alloran was a warrior.> The truth hit me like a brick wall. It was true! I had made it possible for the sub-visser to take control of Alloran!

I had created the abomination!

<Chapman told us about the Time Matrix, of 180

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course. But we needed you to show us where it was. Wonderful! Your qualms delivered Alloran to me. The attack by the Mountain Taxxons could have disAlloran and the Time Matrix. Mine!> rupted everything, but you know, in the end it was

<Really?> I said faintly. <I seem to be the one convenient. It kept you from growing suspicious. holding the shredder.>

You were too busy worrying about your fellow

<There are a dozen Bug fighters closing in right *aristh*. You didn't even have time to wonder how now. You've lost, lithe one.>

the two humans just happened to be waiting for

<You'll be a cinder by the time they get here,> I y o u . You didn't wonder why my troops let you threatened.

escape.>

<No, you won't kill a helpless foe,> he sneered. I had done this! I had created this abomination! I

<I have no weapon! I am your prisoner! Hah-hah! I had delivered the Time Matrix into the hands of this surrender to you, Elfangor. I surrender!> vile creature!

He spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness

<But you know the best part?> The sub-visser as he laughed at me. Laughed. laughed. <I really couldn't have let you burn that

<You're right, Sub-Visser. I won't kill you.> I transport ship full of my people. Chapman didn't squeezed the trigger. The stun-setting knocked the know about the Yeerks in that transport, so neither foul Andalite-Controller to the ground.

did I. And if you'd gone along with Alloran I'd have I ran to Loren. I dragged her unconscious body had to try to stop you. So would my brother Yeerk in up the ramp into the *Jahar*. Then, after a second's the human girl. It was one thing to sacrifice the poor hesitation, I dragged Chapman aboard, too.

fool who played the role of me. But ten thousand I was just beginning to try dragging the subYeerks? No, I'd have had to act, and then you and visser to the ship when the first wave of Bug fighters Alloran together would have most likely made short blew by overhead. They shot past, then began to inwork of me.> scribe tight circles, coming back toward us. I couldn't breathe. I had failed. Failed so enorTwo more Bug fighters. Then two more. The sky was filling with Bug fighters. I would never get the mously that the entire Andalite species was at risk!

Jahar off the planet.

<But no, Elfangor is one of those good Andalites,> Sub-Visser Seven sneered. <You don't go Unless .. .

in for slaughtering the helpless, do you? Hah-hah!

Had Sub-Visser Seven informed his people that 183

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he might be in an Andalite body? Surely. Surely he

<Good, you're not blind as well as stupid. I want would have. He would have had to, just to avoid to see him run. Do you understand me! As soon as I being accidentally shot by his own people.

have lifted off, make him run! And then, when he is But could the Yeerks tell one Andalite from angood and tired, when his knees buckle with exhausother?

tion, make him dead. Dead! And if you fail me, I will I raced to the ship, tore open the medical kit and feed you to the Taxxons. Sub-Visser Seven, out.> yanked out a stimulant hypo. I ran back to the unI switched off the screen without waiting for an conscious sub-visser and I emptied the stimulant answer. Maybe it would work. Maybe not.

into his bloodstream. It would revive him in less I keyed the controls, lifting the *Jahar* gently from than a minute.

the ground. I switched on an exterior view and Bug fighters were hovering overhead now, some panned the viewfinder till I framed the sub-visser. preparing to land. I ran back to the *Jahar*, closed the He was just climbing to his feet.

hatch, and punched up the ship-to-ship communiI'll give the sub-visser credit for one thing: He cation.

was not an idiot. He knew instantly what was hapThe face of a Hork-Bajir-Controller appeared on pening. He broke into a run, just as a hovering Bug my communications screen. It stared at me with the fighter fired a Dracon beam near him.

fury and distaste Yeerks always show for Andalites. I let the *Jahar* drift casually over the Skrit Na I stared straight back. And in loud, arrogant, wreck. Focusing all my attention, I powered the *Ja*- harsh thought-speak I said, <What? You don't rec *har's* tractor beam and latched it onto the white ognize your sub-visser? Hah-hah! I have done it, sphere of the Time Matrix.

you fool! As I said I would. I have acquired an AnSub-Visser Seven was running at full Andalite dalite body!>

speed across the sand, pursued by teasing, taunting The Hork-Bajir eyes wavered, uncertain.

Bug fighters that seemed to enjoy shooting within If I showed any hesitation, I was lost. If I was to inches of him.

pass as a Yeerk sub-visser, I could not show any The *Jahar* rose, with the Time Matrix in tow. I d o u b t . < Y o u see the A n d a l i t e d o w n on the pulled the machine closer and closer, snugged it up ground?>

into the *Jahar's* belly, and lashed it in place with en"Yes . . . Sub-Visser Seven." ergy ropes. We rose up through the atmosphere of 185

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the Taxxon world. Up through the weird, bright clouds.

Only then did it begin to dawn on the Yeerks. The ship-to-ship snapped on. An ugly, suspicious Hork-Bajir face glared at me. "Sub-Visser Seven, planet control respectfully directs you to land." I tried bluffing some more. But when I refused to immediately turn back and land, they knew.

"So, this is Zero-space," Loren said, looking out Tactical showed a swarm of Bug fighters rising through the viewport. "We've been in it for a full up from the surface of the planet. But it was too day and I still don't understand what it is." late.

I directed my stalk eyes to the viewport. I saw I punched up a hard burn and prepared to lose blank white. Empty, whiteness. <Zero-space isn't myself in Zero-space.

anything, really,> I said quietly. <It's antispacespace. You know, like antimatter and antigravity? Well, Zero-space is antispacespace.>

I had explained this at least twice during the last day. But I guess she was trying to make conversation. She'd been through one of the worst experiences any creature can endure: She had been made a Controller. I couldn't believe she was even managing to talk without weeping.

Fortunately, the Yeerk in Loren's head had been at the end of its feeding cycle. Yeerks feed on Kandrona rays. Every three days they must drain out of their host and return to the Yeerk pool to absorb Kandrona rays.

So I made a deal with the hungry Yeerk. I could 186

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keep Loren tied up and wait for the Yeerk to starve trapped in one of those centipede bodies, Alloran to death. Or the Yeerk could come out willingly. I made into the first-ever Andalite-Controller. Almost agreed to put it in deep hibernation. To freeze it. lost the Time Matrix. Gonna be tough explaining all The Yeerk decided hibernation was better than this to the folks back home, eh?"

death by Kandrona ray starvation.

I ignored him. Back home. What was home anyI kept my word to the Yeerk. After it crawled out more? Was I supposed to return home? Home to of Loren's ear, I froze it. And then I ejected it from my parents? Run free on my old, familiar grass?

the ship into the vacuum of real space. Someday it Spend my days with my old childhood friends?

might be found and revived. More likely it would I wasn't a child anymore. My home was still sink into the gravity well of a star and be there, but I would never belong there again. incinerated.

Loren came over to me. "Elfangor. Snap out of Especially since I made sure to eject it close to a it. We're going in circles in Zero-space." sun.

<Yes. I know.>

Maybe that wasn't living up to the spirit of my

"You did the best you could. You're just a kid, deal with the Yeerk. But somehow, I just didn't care. like me."

My notions of proper behavior had brought disaster.

<I am an *aristh* in the Andalite military. I disI was a fool. A silly child living out storybook noobeyed my prince and caused him to be enslaved by tions of decency and fairness.

the Yeerks. The Yeerks will now learn everything. All there was no decency in war. Alloran had tried. Ioran knows about our defenses. Everything he has to teach me that. I'd learned it too late.

knows about the capabilities of our weapons. Every "Have you decided where we're going, Elfangor? He knows about the locations of our ships. At last?" Loren asked gently.

least he wasn't a scientist, so he can't give them

"He doesn't know," Chapman said. He spent his morphing technology or computer software. But he is now sitting in a corner, glaring darkly at the wall. It will still be the greatest intelligence victory in Yeerk history. Sub-Visser Seven had been inside Chapman's head. If that had taught the foolish human Chapman shook his head. "Guess I was right to a lesson, it sure didn't show. "Elfangor is confused. throw in with the Yeerks, eh? You Andalites are going to be that right? He screwed up bad . . . Arbronn is down. Unless . . ."

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Loren glared at him. "Why don't you shut up?" But where? Where should I draw the Yeerk

Chapman just grinned. "Unless you Andalites fleet?

use the Time Matrix thing. Go back in time, find that *StarSword*! My old ship. She was off purloining the little tribe of Yeerk slugs. Kill 'em and the entire suing a Yeerk task force near the Graysha Nebula. Yeerk species is gone. Gone and never even existed. She'd been hoping to meet a second Dome ship. What do they call that? Oh yeah, genocide. You up there.

for a little genocide, Elfangor?"

Two Dome ships. Plus the *Jahar*. Enough fire I just shook my head wearily. <Don't waste your power to handle just about anything the Yeerks are taunting me, Chapman. It won't work.> could muster.

Loren looked puzzled. "What do you mean?" I went to the control panel and entered the coordinates. <He's trying to goad me into using the Time Matrix. Remember, he's been a Controller, however

"You have a plan?" Loren asked.

briefly. Sub-Visser Seven left him instructions, just in

<More or less,> I muttered. I was already having a case something went wrong. Chapman knows that doubts. <There's a place called the Graysha Nebula. to use the Time Matrix I'd have to return to real space. We don't know much about it. But there are rumors of a sentient species living in that area. And there is a beacon on the *Jahar*. If we return to normal space, are rumors that the Yeerks are exploring the nebula. we'll light up every

Yeerk sensor within a million My old ship, the *StarSword*, went there to see if it light years.>

could locate a Yeerk task force we were pursuing.> I could see from the dark rage on Chapman's

"So we're going there to meet up with your old face that I had guessed correctly.

ship. Is . . . is this nebula place closer to Earth?" At least I'd gotten one thing right. I wasn't fool

<No.>

enough to fall for

"Elfangor . . . am I ever going to get back Suddenly, it was as if a light had gone on in my home?"

head. Wherever the *Jahar* emerged into real space,

<Loren, I will do my best.>

the Yeerks would go tearing after it.

Chapman snorted. "And you've seen how good E

No matter where.

lfangor's best is. You might as well kiss Earth goodA trap! I could spring a trap!

bye. "

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species communicate by making sounds with their mouths. But it had never occurred to me you could silence someone with a piece of hose.

<To silence an Andalite you'd have to knock him out,> I said. <This won't hurt him?>

"No. Unfortunately." She smiled to show she had been joking.

<We will emerge into real space,> I explained. After all she had been through, from being kid<If w e ' r e l u c k y , we w o n ' t be far f r o m t h e napped by Skrit Na to being made a Controller, she *StarSword*. If we're even luckier, there will be addicould still laugh. I wondered if I'd been wrong to tional

Andalite ships close by. From that point it will think humor was a weakness. I wondered if Arbron only take the Yeerks an hour or so to start showing could still laugh.

up.>

"Elfangor . . . aren't you t e m p t e d by what

"And then?" Loren asked.

Chapman said? I mean, if it were me, I might want

<Space battle, I suppose. Andalite fighters and to use that Time machine thing to change things. Yeerk Bug fighters going at it. Us, too, of course. You know?"

> "Is there anything I can do to help?"

<Like maybe go back in time and avoid getting

<Yes. Show me the best way to tie up a human,> I kidnapped by the Skrit Na to begin with?> said, looking at Chapman. <I don't want any disShe laughed. "No. Not that. Look, my life was tractions.>

pretty dull before all this. I know when you take me We tied the human around his feet and hands back to Earth you'll have to erase all my memories using spare conduit hose. Then we tied the hands to of this. But still, even though it was horrible somethe feet behind his back. times, I don't think I'd want to never have met you.

"One last thing," Loren said. She took a short If it wasn't for my mom worrying and all . . ." length of the hose and wrapped it around

I was surprised. And pleased, too. <In the Skrit Chap-man's face, covering his mouth. "Now we Na ship, where I found the Mustang, I also found won't have to listen to him."

pictures of Earth. It looked very beautiful. WonIt took me a few seconds to understand. Many derful, delicious-looking grass and tall trees and 193

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streams of water that bubbled across stones. Is your knows how many other things that might affect?

home like that?>

Besides, to be honest, I guess I'm scared of the Elli"We do have places like that," Loren said, smilmists.> ing sadly. "There's a place we went once, back

"The what?"

when I was little and my dad was still with us. Be<Supposedly they're the race that built the Time fore he went to the war. It's a place called Yosemite. Matrix. Thousands and thousands of years ago. We camped out in a tent. Yosemite is like that." They built it, and then, suddenly, as far as anyone

<And did you stick small white cylinders in your can tell, they vanished. The entire species of Ellimists mouth and smile at the beauty of it all?> just

vanished.>

"Small white cylinders?" Loren looked puzzled.

"You think it was because they used the Time Then she laughed her strange but delightful human Matrix?"

laugh. "You were looking at cigarette ads! Those

<No one knows. Some people say the Ellimists white cylinders are called cigarettes. They're bad for still exist, but they've moved beyond the normal you, actually. Very bad for you. They make you space-time dimensions we know. There are some sick."

who say the Ellimists are almost all-powerful.> I

<So . . . so humans go to beautiful places and shrugged. <Of course, there are others who say use sickening cylinders? Why?>

they're gone forever. Or even that they never did But Loren was laughing too hard to answer. And exist. Now Andalite parents tell their children stories pretty soon, even though I had no idea what was so about the Ellimists.>

funny, I was laughing, too. Although my laugh

"Fairy tales."

could only be heard by Loren inside her own head.

<Are fairies magical beings in human mythol"So," she said after a while. "Why don't *you* ogy?>

want to use this Time Matrix thing?"

"Not just fairies. We have elves and leprechauns I waved my stalks forward and back in a gesture of and Santa Claus and hobbits and werewolves and uncertainty. <You can't just go messing around with vampires. . . . We even have aliens from outer time. They say it's insanely complicated. Sure, maybe space."

I could go back, like Chapman said, and stomp Despite myself, I laughed. <Yes, those outer out the first Yeerks who evolved. But who space aliens are quite troublesome.>

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"Doesn't the Time Matrix prove that these Elliout of that box. The Flattie wouldn't even know mists are real?"

what was happening, because he's never gone up

<Well . . . I don't know. But if Ellimists *are* real, if or down before. He doesn't even know up and they really do live in dimensions beyond our own, down exist.>

then they have powers we could not imagine. Pre"You're saying we're like the Flatties. Except tend . . . never mind.>

we're in three dimensions, not just two. So we're

"No, tell me," Loren urged. "Unless you have like Cubies or something."

something else to do."

<Yes. So if some creature came along who existed in more dimensions than us, he'd be able to do dimensions. There are the normal dimensions of things that would be impossible for us.> up/down, left/right, and forward/back. Then there

"Eliminists. That's what they are?" is the fourth dimension, which is time. Then, there

<Maybe. Like I say, no one knows. But someone are six other dimensions, but they are curled up into built the Time Matrix. Someone real. Someone who themselves, so we don't see or feel them. All we feel isn't around anymore.>

are three space dimensions, plus time.>

"Whew."

Loren nodded her head. I wondered what this

<So maybe we could use the Time Matrix and meant. But she didn't ask me to stop, so I went on. pop in and out of time. Or maybe we'd disappear,

<Imagine if, instead of three normal space dilike the Eliminists may have.> mensions, we only had two. Imagine we were flat,

"Or maybe we'd just make these Eliminists mad," and we couldn't go up or down, just in the other Loren said.

two directions. Call us the Flatties. See?>

<Exactly.>

"Like if we lived on a piece of paper," Loren said.

"But if you give the Time Matrix to your people,

<Exactly. It would be like we were drawings on a won't they use it, anyway? Even with all the risks?" piece of paper. And if someone came along and

<A week ago I'd have said absolutely not. I'd drew a box around us, we could never get out. Behave said we Andalites don't do things like that. Not even in war.>

cause the lines of the box would be walls. But what if a three-dimensional person came along? A three"But now . . . whatever Alloran did on that dimensional person could lift that Flattie right up Hork-Bajir planet, it was wrong, wasn't it?" 196

chapter 30

I stared at her with my main eyes. <Loren, I don't know what's right or wrong anymore. I just don't.>

The computer signaled that we were nearing the translation point.

<We're going back to normal space,> I said.

<And by the way . . . if we do survive all this, and get you back to Earth, could you show me this place

<Coming out of Zero-space . . . now'> with the grass and trees and tall waterfalls?> Zero-space is dead white. Normal space is usually deep black, dotted with stars that burn in bright

<Could we have a Mustang there, too?> white and pale red and cold blue.

She put her arm around my waist and looked

But this space was not like that.

deep into my eyes with her two tiny blue human

"Jeez! Amazing!"

eyes. "Anything you want, Elfangor. Just no white

<You've never been close to a nebula,> I obcyinders." served. But the truth was, even I was awed. The nebula was a dust cloud so large that a dozen solar systems the size of Earth's could have been lost in it with room to spare. It was like a weird, twisted cloud. A cloud of purple and orange that seemed to envelop brilliant stars.

"It's so beautiful!"

<Yes. And if the *StarSword* is out there somewhere, it'll really be beautiful.> I glanced over at Chapman. He lay trussed up and gagged. He glared back at me.

<Right now Yeerk ships are hearing the transponder they attached to us. They'll be on us in a very short time. I'm conducting a sensor sweep, looking for any Andalite vessels. But it's hard with good compensators. But even though there was no the nebula around us. The dust confuses the sensefeeling of acceleration, the ship blew through sors.>

space. "Elfangor, what's going on?"

"Are we a long way from Earth?"

<I don't know. But I'm powering up all

<Yes. Even by the standards of space. We are weapons.>

hundreds of light-years away.>

At Maximum Burn it took less than ten minutes Loren stared out at the nebula. She bit her lip a for us to be able to spot the great Dome ship. She little with her teeth and took her arm away from my came up on my view screen at high magnification. waist.

She looked like a glowing steel stick with a bright Humans like to use touch. It seems odd at first. half-ball on one end. Her engines were off. In the But I had gotten used to it.

space around her were a dozen or more of our

<I'm going to try calling the *StarSword*,> I said. fighters.

I made the thought-speak link with the commuBut what caught my attention were the asternications system. <Any Andalite ship this sector, any oids — rough, dark tumbling rocks. The *StarSword* Andalite ship this sector. This is *Jahar*.> seemed to be in the middle of an asteroid field. Only I expected to have to wait. I was shocked when I that was unlikely. Asteroids orbited stars. There was heard the voice of Captain Feyorn. <*Jahar! Jahar!*

no star close enough to hold an asteroid field in its Alloran, is that you? We are under attack. Say again, gravity.

under attack. Can you —>

"Hey! It moved!" Loren said.

<*StarSword*, I lost you! *StarSword!*> I checked

<What are you talking about?> I demanded. I the display. Yes, we had a location fix! I punched in sounded rude because I was busy trying to figure the new heading.

out what was going on. And I didn't think a human

<Loren, get down on the ground. Back against was going to be very helpful, really.

the bulkhead. I'm going to Maximum Burn!>

"Those rocks. Those asteroids. Look! Look at She ran and threw herself down on the ground, them!"

just as I punched in the burn. But the acceleration I turned one stalk eye to watch the asteroids. was barely noticeable. The *Jahar* had amazingly Then, in a flash, I focused all four eyes.

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<They're moving! They are under power!> As we stared, transfixed, one of the asteroids seemed to sprout a tail. It was a plume of hot plasma! The asteroid turned! It changed course, and shot toward one of the StarSword's fighters. The fighter fired a full-power shredder blast at the asteroid. The green beam zapped through the vacuum. The asteroid glowed where the shredder

"What are those t h i n g s ? " Loren asked in blast hit, and then it increased speed.

horror.

The fighter turned to run. But to my amazement,

<I don't know. I've never seen or heard of anythe asteroid accelerated. It stayed on the fighter's thing like them. I mean, they are impossible!> tail, twisting, turning, accelerating and then . . .

"They're like living asteroids or something."

"Oh! Elfangor, look!"

<I think that's exactly what they are. But that's

<No! It's impossible!>

impossible.>

A pillar of living rock extended from the asteroid As I watched in horror, a second fighter was like some primitive arm. It struck the fighter. I saw a caught and swallowed up by a living rock.

tiny puff as the air was squeezed from the ship.

<The StarSword will start shooting now,> I said And then the rock simply grew over the doomed confidently. <A Dome ship's shredders can blow ship. It grew swift, unstoppable, until, within secchunks off a planet. They'll wipe these things out!> onds, the entire fighter was covered by living rock.

TSEEEWWWWW! TSEEEWWWWW!

The asteroid had eaten a fighter.

I had never seen the StarSword's main shredders fire before. It was awesome. The beams of green light looked as thick as tree trunks as they blasted through space and hit one of the asteroids with enough power to punch a hole

through a moon. The asteroid glowed brightly. But it did not explode. It did not disintegrate. It did not melt. It turned!

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<It's going after the *StarSword*!> I punched up communications. <*StarSword*, Dozens of the asteroids seemed to be swarming *StarSword*, this is *Jahar*. The asteroids are attracted the space around the *StarSword*. Close by, not three by energy discharge! You're drawing them to hundred miles away, I saw another fighter, twisting you!>

and turning, trying to lose one of the rocks. I don't know if my message got through or not.

<Go to Zero-space!> I yelled. <Whatever these But just then, I realized we had a whole new set of things are, they can't have Zero-space flight!> problems. Behind us, two Yeerk ships materialized, I guess the fighter pilot thought the same thing. I entering real space! They were no more than five saw his engines glow bright as he powered up for a thousand miles away.

Zero-space jump. Suddenly, three more asteroids A Pool ship, like a fat, awkward, three-legged closed in on the fighter. They blocked its path. A spider. As soon as it appeared in real space, it began massive arm of rock shot out and punched right into launching Bug fighters.

the fighter.

And beside the Pool ship, something I had never The pilot was blown clear. Out into empty space. seen before. It was jet black so that it was barely He kicked his hooves for a few seconds. Then he visible. It was smaller than the Pool ship, but bigstopped moving. ger than a Bug fighter. What seemed to be the

"Oh, God!"

bridge was a hard-edged diamond attached by a

<No! No! N0000!>

long triangular shaft to twin engines. The engines The *StarSword* fired all shredders, lighting up were a strange shape, like the blades of a twoblack space with brilliant beams of light. But it didn't headed ax.

work. In fact, it seemed to draw more asteroids. The entire thing looked like some ancient

"Hey! That's just attracting them," Loren cried. " weapon — a battle ax. It was like some flying HorkThe engines and the weapons — they attract Bajir. A Blade ship.

them!"

Don't ask me how I knew. I don't believe in psy<You're right!> I don't know which shocked me chic things, although some Andalites do. But still, I more. That these asteroids were drawn to energy knew who was in that Blade ship.

discharges. Or that it was the human girl who had I felt cold hatred. Hatred of that black ship. Hafigured it out. tred of the abomination I had helped to create.
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<So. He's still alive,> I whispered. <This time, no
"Got it," she said.
mercy.>

I switched on my screen. <So, Sub-Visser Seven. Space was filling up quickly. Yeerk ships, AnYou survived. Too bad.> dalite ships, and the deadly, impossible asteroids.

<I did survive. But you almost got me there, you But the Yeerks were thousands of miles behind me, really did. And by the way, it's no longer Sub-Visser and I was thousands of miles from the Andalite Seven. I'm the first Yeerk to capture an Andalite fleet. If I was lucky, the Yeerks would not be able to body. I have already delivered more intelligence on see the Dome ship on their sensors yet.

Andalite fleet deployments than a century of And they would not even be looking for murderspying could have yielded. So it's not *Sub-Visser* ous asteroids.

thing anymore. You are addressing *Visser* The computer blinked to show an incoming

Two.>

communication. It was visual as well as

<You're still just a slug as far as I'm concerned. thought-speak. The image that appeared on the You want the Time Matrix?> I asked. <Come and screen was Andalite.

take it from me. I promise you —>

The familiar face of Alloran-Semitur-Corrass. But

TSSSSEEEWWWW!

from that familiar face shone an evil that I cannot Loren fired the shredder on low power. I jerked describe.

suddenly, and slumped forward, turning off the

<Ah, Elfangor, I believe,> Sub-Visser Seven said. screen as I fell.

<Still have the Time Matrix, I hope? I'm here to take I jumped back up.
it from you.>

"You want this back?" Loren asked, holding the I had not yet switched on my own image for him shredder toward me.

to see. I had to think fast. I grabbed a handheld

<No. Keep it. You did well. Perfect timing. The shredder and carefully set it for lowest power. visser will think you're still a Controller. He'll think

<Loren? Listen! The sub-visser doesn't know you stunned me. I'm killing all power. We'll just wait you aren't still a Controller. Take this. Stand behind for the sub-visser to come to us.>

me, where he can see you when I switch on my

"Is this going to work?" Loren asked anxiously. screen. Give me a few seconds to talk, then fire this.

<If it doesn't, neither of us is going to the But miss me, okay?>

Yosemite,> I said.

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"You picked a great time to learn how to joke, like shards of glass. My left arm was as numb as Elfangor."

stone. My left front leg was useless. I could stand, We didn't have to wait long. The Blade ship fired but I could barely move.

up its engines and leaped forward. It ate up the few

"How do you like it, Andalite?" Chapman thousand miles in seconds.

crowed as he rose to a standing position. He leveled

<Come to me, Visser whatever-your-number-is the shredder at me. now. Come to me,> I muttered to myself.

"Oh, I have so had it with you!" Loren yelled. I targeted the shredders on the belly of the Blade Still lying on the deck, she drew her legs up and ship. I was perfectly calm. Despite the battle I knew kicked upward. Both her artificial hooves hit Chapman was raging around the StarSword. Despite the apman right where his legs joined his body. proach of the visser's ship. One shot was all I

"Ooooofff" Chapman gasped. He grabbed him needed. I would wait till he was practically on me. self with both hands, still clutching the shredder. And then

—

I believe the kick was painful to him.

WHAPPP!

"Oof this!" Loren said. She jumped up off the

"Ahhhh!"

deck and delivered an impossibly high kick that Chapman! He had freed his legs and kicked

caught Chapman under the chin. His head snapped Loren's feet. She went down hard. The shredder back. Loren snatched the shredder from him. skittered across the floor.

"You know, Chapman, you are really making the The human was slower than me. But he was

human race look bad," she said. "You are seriously closer. His bound hands closed around the

embarrassing me."

shredder seconds before I reached him.

"Who's side are you on?" Chapman grated. "Not

TSSEEEEEWW!

yours," Loren said. She fired the shredder and He fired!

Chapman jerked and went limp.

I dodged.

BUMP! BUMP!

The Blade ship closed in.

The Jahar shook from a slow impact. The Blade

TSSEEEEEWW!

ship had latched on! They were boarding us!

<Arrrrggghhh!> A glancing hit. The beam struck As I watched, half-paralyzed, the hatch began to my left arm and left foreleg. Pain shot through me open.

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The tip of my blade hit the console. And to my great pleasure I heard —

TSSSSWWWWEEWW!

The *Jahar* fired her shredders. Point-blank range. Point-blank range into the belly of the Blade ship.

<N000000!> the visser screamed.

Kuh-BOOOOOOOM! The Blade ship tore

The hatch opened.

loose of the *Jahar*.

<Loren! The shredder. . . . Shoot!>

FWWOOOOOSSSH! The hatch was open

The hatch door flew open with a boom. Loren to space. Air blew from the ship, sending it into a fired!

spin. Everything that wasn't bolted down flew

TSSSEEEWWWW!

toward the open hatch.

A Hork-Bajir warrior fell back. An arm appeared, The unconscious Hork-Bajir was thrown into

reaching past the collapsed Controller and aiming a space. Chapman's unconscious body slid toward the Dracon beam.

opening. The visser was knocked down.

An Andalite arm!

But even as he lay there, the Yeerk visser aimed

TSSSSEEEWWWW!

his Dracon beam at me. <You're a real source of agThe Dracon beam fired. The shot missed me but itation, Elfangor. Now, die!>

hit Loren and knocked her, already unconscious, In despair I whipped my tail.

into me. With only three good legs, I fell hard to the WHUMPF! Something hit us hard, just as the

deck on my numb arm. Loren landed on top of me. Yeerk squeezed the trigger.

The evil Yeerk creature who had stolen Alloran's TSSEEEWWWW! The Dracon blast missed me!

body pushed past the Hork-Bajir as I struggled desI was gasping for air. The oxygen was gone. The perately to get out from under Loren.

Jahar was spinning out of control through space. The visser was in! He was aboard the *Jahar*!

The visser slammed against the walls as we spun I had one chance. One. And then let the Yeerk wildly. Loren's body rolled away toward the hatch, kill me! I swung my tail, aiming blind. The visser but now the automatic safety devices of

the ship jerked back reflexively. But I wasn't aiming for him. were slowly closing the door.

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We spun, and through the window I saw flashes But maybe it didn't matter. . . Maybe it was of Andalite fighters half-covered with living rock. pointless to fight. Arbron . . . gone. Alloran . . . And Yeerk Bug fighters now suffering the same fate. worse than gone . Terrible things ... terrible I saw, in a wild, spinning flash, the Blade ship, sights . . .

one blade shot away.

Let it all end. It was fine without air. Fine to suck And then . . . coming at us . . . rushing toward with your lungs and feel nothing. I was sinking, us . . . an asteroid!

down, down, down.

FFWWWUUUMMPPP!

No need to worry. Nothing to be afraid of.

The asteroid latched onto the poor, dying *Jahar*. Let it end, Elfangor.

And in wild, crazily pitching flashes as I was tossed Just let it end. . . .

helplessly, I saw the window going dark. Half-covered now. Half-covered by living rock!

The asteroid had us!

I was slammed violently by acceleration as the asteroid moved away from the battlefield, holding the *Jahar* in its death grip.

The *Jahar's* compensators were off now. The ship was dead. Half-swooning from lack of air, I staggered up, fighting the insane force of acceleration. Air! We needed air!

The emergency environmental power unit

should have come on. But the ship's power was dead, drained away by the energy-eating asteroid. Air!

My lungs screamed. My hearts hammered

madly, circulating useless blood. The manual emergency tanks, I had to . . . to . . . 213

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Part 3

An Alien Dies

chapter 33

Air!

My lungs burned. My hearts pounded desperately. My mind was shutting down from lack of oxygen. As I faded out, a deadly weariness took the place of terror.

The ship's artificial gravity was gone. I floated, weightless, as the floor and walls and ceiling all spun wildly around me.

Why should I care? Why should I resist? Why not just let it all end, here, now, as the *Jahar* fell into the monstrous black hole?

My life was a disaster. I had failed in so many ways . . . Failed to save Arbron from being trapped forever in Taxxon morph. Failed to stop the Yeerk called Visser Thirty-two from stealing the body of my prince, AlloranSemitur-Corrass. Failed to defeat the surprise attack of the living asteroids. Failed even to protect the two humans I was supposed to take care of.

without life there is no despair, but without life there And worst of all, I had failed to deliver the Time can also never be hope.

Matrix to my people. The Time Matrix: power I had no right to erase Loren's hope, no matter beyond imagination.

how bad I felt.

Airless! My head swam with disconnected thoughts and images. Airless! In a ship that spun I searched my crazy, swirling, nightmare world powerless, dead, through space.

with all my eyes and found the panel I was

Through the still-clear window I saw the huge searching for. I focused on it with my stalk eyes, swirl of dust and debris that marked the approaches striving blearily to keep them focused.

to the black hole. But at the center of that swirl, But it was so hard. So hard to know up from nothing the eye could see. It was a collapsed star so down, left from right, with all the world spinning, dense that its gravity trapped light itself. and my own poor oxygen-deprived brain all but exYes, Elfangor, my dying mind said, let it end. tingushed.

I saw the abomination, Visser Thirty-two, the Had to reach that panel.

only Andalite-Controller in the galaxy. The only I would have one chance. One only. Too far

Yeerk ever to gain control of an Andalite body. He gone to try a second time. was swooning from the lack of oxygen. He was I aimed and kicked and flew weightless across slammed by the spinning floor and knocked,

the cabin. Missed! I grabbed. Missed! I floated helpweightless, into the ceiling, four legs flailing, arms lessly away.

and tail all tangled around.

Suddenly, a hand reached up and shoved me

I held on to a protrusion in the control panel. But back toward the panel. A human hand! Impossible!

as the ship twirled, with all gravity gone, I felt someLoren had regained consciousness. In a near vacthing large and soft bump into me. uum. Without air. With temperatures already dropIt was Loren. The female human. Unconscious. ping toward absolute zero!

Never to be conscious again, if I didn't reach the She had regained consciousness. And seen what emergency air supply and use the manual release. I was trying to do. She had propelled me back And then it came to me, in a moment of clarity: I toward the panel. This time I reached and grabbed. had no choice. When Arbron had been in utter deI ripped the panel open, and turned the stiff spair and had wanted to die, I stopped him. Because mechanical release knob.

You cannot see air, of course. You don't really

<Well, we have air, but no power. The living as feel it on your skin, most of the time. But when it is teroids drained the ship of power. We are falling to gone, you notice it. ward a black hole.>

My lungs sucked and drew nothing in. Nothing!

"Oh. That's not good," she said.

My lungs gasped again, and this time, I sensed just

<If we fall into the black hole it will crush us the faintest wisp of something.

down to the size of a carbon atom. The ship, all of I sucked again and <aaaahhh!> A sharp pain as us, crushed to the size of a single atom.> my collapsed lungs filled with air.

"Yeah, we learned about black holes in school." I Air! I drew deep breath after deep breath, each was surprised that humans knew about such things. breath hurting, but hurting less than the one before. It

<There is only one way out, Andalite.> was not a pain I minded.

Visser Thirty-two. The very sound of his thought I clung to the panel with my left hand, my speak voice in my head filled me with rage. hooves floating free, my tail drifting behind me. He sounded exactly like Alloran. But I knew that And for a while I just breathed, and thanked the entire Alloran's mind was a prisoner in his own head universe for letting me feel air in my lungs again. now. He could watch, listen, feel, but not control.

<Are you all right?> I asked Loren.

The Yeerk in his brain controlled him now. The She smiled a human smile, the characteristic up Yeerk moved his arms and legs and tail. The Yeerk turning of the corners of her mouth. It was a weak, decided when each breath would be drawn. The shaky smile. But I was glad to see it.

Yeerk aimed his eyes and formed his thought "I thought we were done for," she said. speech.

<Done for? Oh. Dead. Yes, we almost were. But I turned myself to face him. I had no idea you humans don't give up easily, do you?> which of us would win a tail fight. He had Alloran's

"Neither do you Andalites," she said. "Now experience. But I had seen that I was faster than what?"

Alloran.

I surveyed the situation. The visser appeared to

<Don't be a fool, Elfangor,> the visser sneered. be just regaining consciousness. The other human,

<What will be gained by you and me slashing each Chapman, was still unconscious, drifting lazily against other up with these excellent Andalite tails?>

the far wall like a rag doll.

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<You have a better idea?> I asked. <Because I can I did the familiar calculations in my head. He was right. think of a lot of good reasons to go tail-to-tail with you.> The Time Matrix was probably still just outside The visser laughed. <You blame me for all the ship.

your own failings? I'm not the one who left his

<How do you propose getting to it?> I asked. friend back on the Taxxon world, trapped in that

<We would have to work together, Andalite. And vile worm's body. I'm not the one who

quickly.>

disobeyed his prince's orders and let ten

thousand Yeerks escape. A bit of disobedience that helped cause poor old Alloran's downfall.> I wanted to shrug off his words. But there was truth in them. And it is hard to ignore the truth. And pointless, as well.

<You have something to say, Yeerk?>

<Yes. We are falling toward a black hole in a dead ship. But we have a way out. The Time Matrix.> I stared at him with my main eyes. But my stalk eyes saw Loren look at me with fresh hope.

<In case you haven't noticed, Visser, the Time Matrix is strapped to the outside of the ship. The *outside*. In fact, it's probably drifting free. It was held in place with energy ropes. Those are gone.>

<Gravity,> the Yeerk said. <There should be just enough attraction between the ship and the Time Matrix to keep it close.>

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The Yeerk laughed. <And when you reach the Time Matrix you'll activate it and disappear, leaving me behind.>

<No. I would not leave Loren ... I mean, the humans. Search Alloran's mind. He knows. You'll see it's true.>

Visser Thirty-two considered for a moment. <Yes, it
<Work together?>

seems you are correct. Alloran decided you had

<One of us will have to be reeled outside. On a formed some pathetic
feelings for this human ferop or cable. Someone will have to hold that rope.
male. But just in case you decide to betray me anyAnd someone else will have to
be on the end of that way, I remind you that I still have my tail. I can finish rope.>

your human friend slowly as we sink toward that

<And do what? Pull the Time Matrix in black hole.>

through the hatch? That will mean losing all our air again. We don't h
ave force fields It took a few minutes to tear enough cable loose
anymore.>

from the controls to form a long lifeline. Even

<Yes. It will be do-or-die,> the visser said. <We though I wouldn't weigh
anything, I would still have can use the air hoods for an emergency five minmass
enough to break a too-weak line. utes.>

True to his claim, Visser Thirty-two found four air I stared blankly at him.
<What air hoods?> hoods. They had been stashed in each of the indi<You forget I
control Alloran. And this was his vidual quarters. They were simple but effective
ship. I know all the ship's secrets. There is a small models. Basically, they were
just clear plastic bags supply of emergency hoods. Alloran kept them for that
slipped over your head and tied at the neck. just such an occasion.>

There was a small oxygen bottle. Very small. The I thought about that for a
few seconds. It made hoods were rated for five minutes. The mix of oxyme sick
to cooperate with the Yeerk. But what other gen and other gases, as well as subtler
ingredients, choice did I have? <Here are my terms: I will go outwould keep my
body from depressurizing in the side. You hold the rope.>

vacuum of space.

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But after five minutes my air would run out. The The hatch began to open.
Everything that could oxygen inside my body would expand, bursting have been
sucked out into space already had been, every blood vessel, rupturing my eyes. A
painful so nothing much happened. There was a sort of death.

breeze, then nothing, as the hatch finished opening. I had not explained these
details to Loren. But the cold was like a fist. Cold like nothing any I tied the hood
in place and helped Loren

planet dweller could imagine.

put hers on. We tied one on the still-unconscious Chapman. Then I carefully tied the cable Below me,

huge beyond imagining, was the swirl of around my tail.

dust, feeding the black hole. At the far edge of the

<Ready?> the visser asked me.

swirl was a star. The star was being drained by the

<I'm ready,> I said. <You just worry about yourblack hole. A huge, long, arced plume of hot gas self, Yeerk.>

was being drawn from the star into the black hole. The visser laughed. <Alloran is so right about I hoped there had not been planets around that you. You're a moralizing, arrogant, weak-willed litstar. I hoped no sentient species had met its fate this tle fool.>

way, torn apart by the space-warping might of the

<Loren?> I said. <We're going to open the hatch. black hole.

Air will rush out but we'll do it more slowly than beI had a vision of myself, falling away free. Falling fore. Still, keep an eye on your fellow human. We and falling into the black monster. I shook my head don't want him sucked out into space.>

to clear the image.

"We don't?" Loren asked.

<Focus, Elfangor,> I muttered to myself. <Worry I looked at her, puzzled.

about the black hole if you fail. Not till then.>

"Sarcasm," she explained. "A type of humor." I looked back along the axis of the *Jahar*. I would have l a u g h e d , but I was just too Her elongated oval and three rakish engines and s c a r e d . I lifted the hood and filled my lungs wonderfully long shredder spike still looked so powith cabin air. Then I replaced the hood, turned tent.

on the o x y g e n , and nodded to Visser Thirtytwo. The ship spun in space. Around and around in a wobbly loop. It's disorienting, even if you've 226

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hooves on the hull. Just enough to change my direcbeen through all the training for things like that. The swirl of dust and hot gases would be overhead one tion.

second, beneath me the next. Stars sped by overI floated back toward the engines. Back tohead. ward the Time Matrix. It lay there like the egg I searched back along the ship for the Time of some unimaginably huge bird. Ten feet across, it M a t r i x . But i t w a s n ' t t h e r e . H a d i t d r i f t e d fit neatly into the cradle formed by the engine entirely away? Had the living asteroids taken pylon.

it?

I drifted toward it, stretching out hands stiff and Steadying myself as well as I could, I pushed off numb with c o l d . I touched it! Touched it and into space. I

aimed to counter the spin of the ship. stopped my momentum carefully so that I wouldn't The result was that the ship now spun slowly bebounce off it. neath me. And there, rising from the far side of the My b a r e , frozen hands touched the h a r d , ship, like a moon coming up over a planet, was the smooth surface. And somehow, the Time Matrix Time Matrix.

seemed to warm me. I felt heat glow up through my

<I see it!> I reported. <It's wedged in place by stiff fingers and up my awkward arms.

the engine pylons. Going after it.>

Now how do I move you back to the hatch? I If you have never tried to move in zero gravity, wondered.

you have no idea how utterly impossible it can be. It was far too big to get my arms around. I would You're floating weightless, with no up or down. have to use the cable to fashion a sling. And I had Nothing to push off against. If the cable were to exactly three minutes before the hood ran empty break I could float forever, just a few feet away from and all of us — the visser, Loren, Chapman, and I —

the ship, and yet never be able to move back across were done for. that tiny distance.

I worked quickly, untying the cable from my tail, But I had been well-trained in zero-gravity moveforming it into two big loops with a cross-brace. It m e n t . I yanked lightly on the cable with my wasn't much. It wasn't secure. But it was all I could t a i l , drawing myself back toward the s h i p . I do.

t i m e d the impact c a r e f u l l y a n d t a p p e d two

<Okay,> I said. <Pull!>

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chapter 35

The visser pulled, and slowly the Time Matrix, with me holding onto one of the cable ends, began to move toward the hatch.

It's going to work, I told myself. It's going to work. We are going to use the Time Matrix. The first living creatures to have used the dread machine for

thousands and thousands of years. **We snuggled the Time Matrix up against the hatch, with air and time running out.**

Once more inside the *Jahar*, I could see the suffering that Loren had endured. The blend of gases from the hoods was adjusted for Andalite bodies, not humans. She was in pain from gradual decompression. She could barely stand. The visser, though, still stood. Or at least floated.

<Well done, Andalite,> he said. <Thirty seconds left to activate this thing.>

<Go ahead, Yeerk,> I sneered. <Make your move.>

I saw the coldness in his eyes. Colder even than the freezing cold of space. I knew I had guessed right. He had intended to eliminate me. One slash of his Andalite tail to finish me off.

But I was prepared and he knew it. Which of us would win a tail fight in zero gravity? He didn't know, and neither did I. And there was no time left for mistakes.

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How does one turn this thing on? I wondered, twisted inside out and outside in. Each piece was looking at the white globe half crammed into the connected to every other piece in insane ways that hatchway. *No visible instruments or control panels.* no rational mind could make sense of.

Has to be direct mind-link using a physical inter- And from each piece of the ship there stretched *face*.

lines that curled and twirled through space, conLoren moved her lips as though speaking. But in necting back to the Taxxon world and back to the the vacuum no sound could be heard. I saw through *StarSword* and back to a thousand other places, all the plastic hood that her lips had turned blue. Her somehow visible to me. I could see every place the eyes were fluttering.

ship had been. It was as if each of those places were

<Touch,> I said. <The Matrix responds to touch. I right here and a billion miles away at once!

think if we touch and form a mental link, we But all the lines of the ship were dim and dull can —>

compared to the spectacle of the living bodies The visser moved. Not to attack, but to press his around me. I saw the Andalite body of Alloran hand against the Time Matrix. He was trying to gain opened up and split apart, transparent, twisted so that control over it before I could!

every part could be seen from every angle at once. I I pressed my hand against the Matrix and searched saw the living, beating hearts! I saw the muscles desperately in my mind for a link.

of the tail. I saw the ways the eyes were attached to What happened next is almost impossible to dethe brain, and not just from outside, but from inside. scribe. And surely impossible for anyone to underAnd to my horror, I saw the Yeerk slug. It was stand who has not experienced it himself.

wrapped around Alloran's brain, sinking into every As I touched the Time Matrix, and searched for it wrinkle and crevice, sinking deep between the four with my mind, the entire universe simply opened segments. I could literally *see* the flow of thoughts up. Opened up like a piece of fruit that has been exand emotions. I saw inside the slug that was Visser ploded into its segments. But that's not telling a millionth of it. Thirty-two. I saw the way the Yeerk mind drew memories from Alloran and sent back orders. I saw Everything changed. Everything! The ship around and felt the impotent rage of Alloran as he lay helpme, the familiar *Jahar*, was suddenly not a vessel less in the Yeerk's grasp.

anymore, but an amazing array of fragments, each 232

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I know how impossible it is to really grasp this. But then, amidst all the swarm of information, But I saw in and through and around everything at among all the insides and outsides, all the pasts and once. I saw time lines stretching back from the Yeerk all the connections, I felt the will of Visser Thirtyand back from Alloran. I saw their pasts. And I saw two.

the horrible moment when those time lines became I felt him take hold of the Time Matrix. And I felt entwined, becoming one.

the Matrix respond, felt it turn to him. In the visser's I could see Alloran's past in flashes of wild action Yeerk brain I saw the image of the Yeerk home and wild emotion. I saw the terrible moment when world. He was forming it, clear and detailed. Alloran stood amidst battlefield slaughter on the HorkI saw the awful pools where the Yeerks were Bajir home world. I saw the ground piled high with born. I felt the Kandrona rays that beat down from Hork-Bajir and Andalite dead.

the Yeerks' own strange sun.

And I saw the actual decision deep in Alloran's He was directing the Time Matrix! Aiming it!

despairing brain, the decision to release the forbidTelling it to take him there, to the Yeerk home den Quantum virus.

world!

I felt his bitterness when even that evil measure NO!

failed, and the Hork-Bajir were lost to the Yeerks. I I focused my will, and in the weird universe I insaw the retreat of the shattered, beaten Andalite habited, I saw my own living brain as it focused, force.

concentrated, bringing more and more mental I was almost drowning from this assault of data. It power to bear.

was as if I had been plugged directly into every It was insane! I could watch my own brain work. computer ever built and all of them were dumping Watch my own brain watching my own brain watch information into my brain. ing my own brain.

I even saw the time line of the black hole itself. I I had to take control of the Time Matrix. I had to saw it form from the explosive moment of the unification, to resist the visser. I summoned up an image verse's birth, and watched it condense and burn, in my head. But it was a confused picture. I saw the bright as a huge star. I saw it die and collapse, dig part of the Andalite world where I had grown up. ging a hole in space itself.

The trees, the grass, the sky. . . . But mixed in with 235

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that image were others. I saw them float up out of I realized something else had changed. The black my own brain. I saw them skim by, three-dimensional hole was further away now. The *Jahar* could still be pictures looking so flat and strange in this multidimension, but it, too, was further away. mensional universe.

We were moving! The Time Matrix had been

I saw my own Andalite world, but mixed in with programmed, and we were moving through time. it were images of Earth — the pictures I had seen. The last memory I had, as the cold collapsed my Somewhere far off, I realized I could see my own consciousness, was of someone vast and incredible. body beginning to freeze. Systems were shutting A being like nothing I could have imagined. It saw down. I could see inside fingers that were frozen me. It saw us all.

stiff. I could see a tail that hung limp, all tension And it laughed.

gone. My hearts were beating sluggishly.

I was watching my own body die. I was weakening. The visser, too, was hurt by the cold, but the Yeerk himself, down inside Alloran's head, was still alert and strong.

Slowly the balance shifted to him. The images were more and more of the Yeerk home world. His images were coming in over mine, like a tide. I was losing. I was failing as the cold shut down my body and reached tendrils into my mind.

And then ... a new mind. Alien, but familiar in a way. I saw the Yeerk jerk in alarm and surprise. This new force, this new mind was strong. Stronger than he could have expected.

Loren!

I saw inside her and through her. I saw her thoughts. And I saw her push back the visser's own images. Not defeating him, but keeping him at bay. 236

chapter 36

the "voice" of the tree, deep and simple and powerful. It did not speak in words, of course. Only a handful of trees have ever used words, and

even then, it could take them hours to say a single word. But *Hala Fala* spoke to me, as it usually did, letting me know that it felt my **I woke up with that laughter still ringing in my** presence. Letting me feel its own strange, slow head.

mind.

I opened my main eyes and found to my surprise

<I'm home,> I whispered to *Hala Fala*. that I was standing. I opened my stalk eyes and And then, after all that had happened, I looked around in all directions.

broke down. I sobbed. I cried. I told my guide tree Trees. Grass. A stream running close by. A gentle everything in a rush of disjointed emotion. Of breeze.

course, not even a *Garibah* can understand stories of

<Home? Am I home?>

space travel, of aliens, of wars and terrible decisions. I stared at a *therant* tree. The trunk. The branches. But it could hear my shame. It could hear despair The vines. Impossible! It was *Hala Fala*! The oldest of the *therant* trees in the woods near my home. My for poor, doomed Arbron. It could hear my cries of father had shown me this tree when I was just pain for all I had seen. It heard my fear.

a very small child. It was my *Garibah*. My Guide The *Garibah* could not change what had Tree.

happened. And it could not tell me that I was forgiven, or that all would be well now. I knew I ground my hooves into the grass, taking a samthe ritual of forgiveness. <I have made right please taste. Yes! It was the grass I had grown up on. The grass of home.

everything that can be made right, I have learned everything that can be learned, I have

<How did I get here?> I wondered aloud. sworn not to repeat my error, and now I claim for I reached out with both hands and placed them giveness.>

on the smooth bark of *Hala Fala*. And I heard 238

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But I had not yet made right everything their comical bulging eyes, all this was home. My that could be made right. I had not yet learned to home.

understand my own mistakes. I was not ready to And across that stream, and over that next rise, I swear I would not repeat those mistakes.

would see my family home. Just ahead! I broke Forgiveness for all my terrible failings was still a into a run. I leaped the stream, like I always did, long way off.

and suddenly I had to be home. I didn't care But the *Garibah*, the tree named *Hala Fala*, what anyone said. I didn't care. I wanted my heard me, heard my shame and rage. And being mother and father. I wanted to lie down in the deep heard helped.

grass of the scoop and find my old toys and be a child again.

My sobbing quieted. I took my hands away from the tree's smooth bark.

I ran, flat-out, and yes, the slopes were so familiar I walked slowly away, crunching up the hill! And yes, every tree was where it should be. I ran sweet grass of home and trying, with my to the top of the rise, ready to look down into our exhausted mind, to make sense of what had

neat, oval-shaped family scoop, and —

happened.

I stopped.

Clearly I had used the Time Matrix to carry There it was: the scoop. The bowl dug out of the me through time and space. Without experiencing ground by my great-great-grandparents and planted any passage of time, I was home. But home

with every delicious variety of grass and flowers. *when?* Was this a hundred years ago? And there was the lodge, the blue-plex awning that thousand? The *Garibah* had been alive for seven covered the south quarter of the scoop and kept our thousand years. It could be anywhere in that time things out of the rain.

span.

But just behind the scoop, in a place it could not I remembered trying to turn the Time Matrix possibly be, was a waterfall.

to my own visions. And I guess I had succeeded. It was an incredible waterfall. It fell hundreds of All these trees, all this lush grass, the *kafit* bird that feet from the edge of a cliff. A cliff that simply stood fluttered by overhead,

the little *hoobers* that there. No mountains on either side. Just a cliff that jumped on springy tendrils and stared at me from rose sharply up from the grass.

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I felt a sick queasiness in my stomach.

And I had never known the sky of the Yeerk

I was seeing something I had seen before. It was world, but now I could guess that, too. It was green the picture from what Loren had called a cigarette and torn by bolts of electricity.

ad. But it was in a place it should not be. In a place it *What have we done?* I wondered.

could not be. It was violating the very laws of And I remembered the laughter of that vast and physics.

strange being I had glimpsed.

This was not home.

I tore my gaze away from the impossible waterfall, and looked around. From the top of the rise I could see fairly far.

What I saw was impossibility piled on impossibility. But what I focused on first was the sky.

It was a deep red and gold, like the red and gold of my own world. It was also light blue, with fluffy white clouds. And it was green.

Stretching over my head was a sky broken into jigsaw-puzzle fragments. Here a patch of Andalite sky. There a lighter blue. And over there, a shocking green torn by ragged bolts of electricity. Clouds drifted through the paler blue segments and then disappeared when they reached a different

segment. Lightning in the green sky disappeared when it reached one of the other patches.

I had never known what the sky of Earth looked like, but now I could guess. It was pale blue, with fluffy white clouds.

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chapter 37

I was startled by something that reached up out of the ground with a soft SHLOOP! It was like a Taxxon tongue, almost. Ten feet long and dark red, it shot up from a hole in the ground. It seemed to lick the air in a slow, circular pattern, as if it was searching blindly for something. Then, after a few seconds, it SHLOOPED! back into the ground.

I wandered, amazed and appalled, through a Ten feet away, another such tongue. This time it **world that made no sense.** The parts that were fareached for a beast that walked past, hunched over. The miliar just made other parts seem stranger. beast had four thick legs toward the back and two turned-in legs forward, with no discernable head. My scoop was there, right where it should be. But no one was around. Not a single other Andalite. Not my This lumbering creature wandered straight toward father or my mother.

the flickering tongue and suddenly, fast as a tail, the Why? Where was I? If this wasn't home, where was tongue reached out and wrapped around the beast's it?

hind legs. The beast let out a groan, although where that sound came from, since it seemed not to have a I wandered through woods and across

head, was a mystery to me.

open fields that were familiar. But then, across a field I'd known all my life, I found a sharp line The tongue drew the beast toward its hole. But it drawn. The grasses of home stopped abruptly. could not suck the animal down, so it simply held it And on the other side everything turned brown prisoner as the beast groaned.

and muddy gray and a red so dark it was almost black.

The sky directly over that dark, unnerving landscape was dirty green and veined with silent lightning. It looked On one side of the line, my own world. On the other altogether like one of the fantasy-monster lands in side of the line, wild, tall, spiky grass and trees that rose fables that Andalite parents tell their little children only a foot tall before spreading out horizontally for about.

thirty or forty feet. If you could even call something like that a tree.

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I felt sick twisting inside me. I had never been to haps even Loren was here, then so was he. Somethe Yeerk world, of course. But already I was beginewhere. Maybe within the confines of his Yeerk ning to guess what had happened. And I was sure world, but maybe not!

that this blasted, vile, and empty landscape was the If I could go looking for Loren, so could he. And Yeerk home world.

if he found her first . . .

Or at least the Yeerk home world as Visser

I saw the towering cliff from which the waterfall Thirty-two saw it.
dropped and raced toward it, desperate now to find

<The Time Matrix! Where is the Time Matrix?> I Loren. I ran flat-out. As I ran, I ate. It felt so good. asked myself. It was the key. The Matrix had caused Whatever else might be strange and unreal, the all this. The Matrix had created this awful place grass was good and familiar. And as it traveled up without logic or reason. And only through the my legs from my hooves, I felt my strength growMatrix could I escape. ing.

<Loren. Where is she?>

I reached the pool where the water crashed in a I looked up at the sky and saw the patches of huge white explosion. As I drew closer, I saw that lighter, paler blue. The blue of Earth's sky. She the woods surrounding that pool were split into would be beneath one of those patches of Earth three different sections. The familiar Andalite trees blue. I was confident of that.

filled a third or so. And different, but still lovely trees But which patch?

and green grass, covered another third. Around The waterfall. That was the place to start. It was still another third was more of the dark Yeerk landthe tallest thing around. scape.

I turned my back on that depressing Yeerk vision It was all utterly impossible, of course. But still, and ran back t o w a r d the empty mockery of standing beneath that massive waterfall, feeling the my home scoop. It was hard to look at that familiar cold spray on my face, it was beautiful, too. area and accept the fact that it wasn't really my

"Elfangor!"

home.

I turned my stalk eyes and saw her. Relief

Visser Thirty-two! It hit me like a shock from one flooded through me.
<Loren! You're here!> " of those Yeerk lightning bolts. If I was here, and perYeah. I'm here, all right. But where is *here*?" 247

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<Wait. come to you.>

<There were three of us who made contact with I went toward her, threading my way around

the Time Matrix. You, me, and Visser Thirty-two.> bushes and trees. And she came running toward She twisted her human lips into a grimace. Then me. She threw her strong human arms around my she looked skyward. "Those patches of green sky shoulders. And even though touching is more of a with the lightning. That's because of him, isn't it?

human thing than an Andalite thing, it wasn't so Somehow, we made this place. The three of us. We bad.

created this place."

"Man, I thought I was all alone here," Loren I stared at her in astonishment. There was no said.

way she could begin to know about the physics of

<No. I am here.>

the Time Matrix. And yet she had reached the same

"I would swear this was Earth, only look at the conclusion as I had.

sky. It's all in patches. And some of those patches I laughed. Maybe Loren didn't understand the are very weird."

physics of the Time Matrix. But then again, neither She released her hold on me, and after a second did I. Neither did any Andalite, as far as I knew. or two, I realized I should do the same.

Compared to the creatures who had created the

<Have you looked around at all?>

Time Matrix, humans and Andalites were equally She shook her head. It's something humans do primitive.

to answer no. "I woke up over there, a few hundred

<What do you think happened?> I asked Loren. feet back in the woods. Elfangor, it's exactly like this She smiled. "You're asking me?" She shrugged. area of the park back home. There's a park where I

"Well, that time machine — the Time Matrix, play softball."

or whatever you call it — is not just like some

<Yes. It would be familiar to you. And there will car you drive through time. I think to steer it probably be other familiar parts. Places you know. you have to imagine the place and time where Maybe we could go and look around, now that you want to go. I think with three of us each we are together.>

having different ideas of where we wanted to go, She cocked her head sideways and looked at me. well, this is the result: part me, part you, part .. .

"You're still worried, aren't you?" part *him*."

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chapter 38

I saw that her eyes were staring past me. I adjusted my stalk eyes to follow the direction of her gaze.

There, standing on the far side of the pool, was Visser Thirty-two. The abomination.

But Visser Thirty-two was not standing alone. Visser Thirty-two stood on the bank of the pool in the Yeerk zone, under his own green sky. And on either side of him stood a creature like nothing I had ever seen or imagined. They were each about three feet tall and four and a half feet long. They were mostly a dark, dirty yellow with irregular black spots. But the head and shoulders were the deep red of the Yeerk plants.

The heads were tiny for the bodies, elongated, almost needle-sharp. The mouths were long and narrow. Hundreds of tiny, bright red teeth stuck out, jagged and wildly different in length and shape. But what struck me as strangest was that the creatures did not have legs in the usual sense. They had wheels.

Yes, wheels. Four of them, to be exact.

The wheels were located where legs should be. Each was sloppy and irregular in shape, not perfectly round. But it was easy to see that the wheels were for real. There was mud and dirt all around them, and when I strained my stalk eyes I could

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even see where the creatures had left tracks in the plunged her hand into the water, and withdrew it. dirt. Wheel tracks.

She was holding a rock. She drew her arm back,

"Elfangor, what are those things?" swept her arm in a big loop, and released the rock

<I have no idea. I can't imagine what evolution with precise timing. The rock flew through the air at any path would conceivably have created a creature an impressive speed.

with wheels.>

And the aim wasn't bad, either.

Visser Thirty-two actually gave a jaunty wave of

BONK!

his hand. <So, young Elfangor, we meet again. As

<Ahhh!> the visser cried. The rock had struck you see, I brought my pets: Jarex and Larex. And him right in the face, just below his left main eye. you brought your pet, too. Your pet human.> I don't know who was more amazed, me or the Loren looked at me. In a voice Visser Thirty-two visser.

was sure to hear, she muttered, "You know, Elfan<What . . . what do you call that?> I asked her. gor, I'm beginning to see why you Andalites really

"That? We call that softball. I pitch for Frank's dislike Yeerks. Whatever body they may be in, they Pro Shop Twins back home. All-city two years in a still have the manners of slugs."

row."

<Brave little human girl,> the Yeerk visser mocked.

<What is softball?>

<Do you understand that even now my people are

"It's a game we play."

on their way to evaluate your primitive world? Do

<And you hit people in the face with rocks?> " you understand that within a few years your people, Not usually."

you humans, will be slaves of the Yeerk Empire?> I was impressed by the human ability to throw

"Blah, blah, blah," Loren said.

things with such force. I was sure that Andalite sciI had no idea what that meant. Neither did the entists would enjoy studying humans someday. visser.

They appeared more frail and ridiculous than they

"You do a lot of talking for a slug," Loren clariwere. fied. "You think I'm scared of you?" The visser was not impressed. He was just angry.

<Yes. I know you're scared of me.>

<So. You propel rocks at me! You'll be very sorry For a moment Loren said nothing, but her lower you ever propelled a rock at me, human. Jarex!

lip was trembling slightly. Then, she knelt quickly, Larex! Attack!>

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The situation stopped being amusing very quickly. The wheels spun faster, and the ungainly yellow The twin beasts turned their wheels, sluggishly at and black monstrosities were nearly to the edge of first. But then picked up speed.

the Yeerk portion of the pool. I watched carefully to I almost didn't move, I was so fascinated seeing see whether they could move from the Yeerk area the biological wheels turn. It was truly incredible. into the human area.

<You admire my pets, Andalite? They are a Unfortunately, the answer was yes.

species called Mortrons. As a young lieutenant I

<Don't worry,> I told Loren. <I can handle these went on a survey party to a world that was later two creatures.>

destroyed when its sun went nova. We thought HUF-HUF-HUF-HUF-
SCRINK-SHWOOP!

we might be able to make Controllers of these Suddenly the creatures each split into two parts!

Mortrons, but that didn't work out. Their brains are The bottom portion, the yellow part with the wheels, simply too tiny to accommodate us. Instead, I swerved away. The dark red upper portion simply brought two of them home as pets.>

rose from the body, unfolded leathery wings I'd All the while the visser talked — or "blah, blah, never even suspected, and flew straight at me!

blahed," as Loren had said — the Mortrons

"Elfangor!" Loren cried.

gathered speed and raced around the

<Hah-hah! Kill, Jarex! Kill, Larex! Kill the Ancircumference of the pool. dalite!> Visser Thirty-two cackled gleefully. They made a strange sound. A HUF-HUF-HUFThe first Mortron — I don't know if it was Jarex H U F. Faster and faster.

or Larex — opened its mouth and showed its rows

<They have amazing capacities, my young

of uneven but brutally unpleasant teeth. It powered friend Elfangor. As you will soon see.>

through the air like a rocket.

<What's the matter, Yeerk? Afraid to fight me tailI dodged left and struck with my tail blade!

to-tail?> I taunted. I hoped the answer was yes,

FWAPP!

because I was not at all sure which of us would win SPLEET! FLUMP. FLUMP.

a tail fight. While I *was* totally confident I could deal My tail blade sliced the Mortron into two chunks. with these Mortrons.

The two separate pieces fell to the ground with a HUF-HUF-HUF-HUF-HUF!

wet splat.

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"Elfangor, the other one!"

frenzy. It gives them an enzyme boost that makes The second Mortron used the distraction prothem regenerate! Try to kill these four and you'll vided by his brother to swoop wide, then arch in behave eight. Kill those eight and you'll have sixteen!

hind me. A tactic that would have worked on most Thirty-two! Sixty-four!>
opponents. But not on an Andalite who can see in I stared in horror as the
Mortron pieces grew and all directions at once.

grew. In seconds they would be ready to attack His toothy mouth was inches
from my neck

again. And anything I did to destroy them would when I struck.
merely make more of them!

FWAPP!

<Loren, I don't know what to do. If only I had a SPLEET! FLUMP. FLUMP.
shredder!>

And the second Mortron bird-portion fell in

"Can you outrun them?"

pieces to the ground.

<Yes, I can. But you can't! They are faster than I was feeling pretty good,
until I looked at the you are. And I won't leave you.>

visser and saw the amusement in his eyes. "

"You won't have to. Maybe. How strong is your Elfangor, look. Look!"
Loren cried.

back? Never mind, it must be strong enough. ElfanI turned my stalk eyes
toward the ground. With gor, don't be offended, okay?"

amazing speed, the two bloody halves of each

<Offended by what?>

Mortron were growing. One piece of each was

"Hold still. I'm gonna try something." growing to become a complete bird-
portion again. She came to me and placed one hand on the

And the other piece was going even further —

back of my neck. She placed another hand on my growing into a complete,
two-piece, yellow and rump, right at the base of my tail. And suddenly, she black,
four-wheeled Mortron.

leaned her weight on me, swung one leg up and I had sliced both Mortrons
in half. And now they over, and came to rest straddling my back. She sat were
becoming four Mortrons.

there with one human leg hanging off either side of

<Are you doing the math in your head, Elfanmy back and held her hands
clasped around my gor?> the visser jeered. <They regenerate! Cut an neck.

attacking Mortron in pieces and each piece grows I turned my stalk eyes
around and found myself again to become a complete Mortron. It's the killing
staring directly into her small blue human eyes. 256

chapter 39

"Now let's run," she said.

<With you on my back?>

But even while I was standing there in blank astonishment, I saw a fully formed Mortron rise from the dirt. It was just a few feet away and it launched its birdpart. Leather wings propelled jagged razor-sharp teeth straight for my throat.

"Elfangor, this is not the time to think," Loren yelled. **We ran. Or I ran, and Loren rode lightly on my**

"Run! Ruuuuun!"

back. And we quickly outran the visser's beasts. Those So I did. With the human girl actually on my biological wheels were swift, but not as swift as an back, I ran.

Andalite's hooves.

As for the visser, he chose not to give chase. At least not just then. But I knew I had not seen the end of him.

We left the "Andalite" portion of this new universe and ran through an increasingly strange environment. The sky overhead was blue, but darkening just a bit. The woods gave way to a cluttered landscape filled up with manufactured things. The grass under my hooves became a hard,

gray-black substance. White stripes lined the middle.

<What is this thing we are on?> I asked. "It'

s a street," Loren said.

<What does it do?>

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"Well, remember that Mustang you were drivI didn't know what to say to that. My own home ing around on the Taxxon world? Streets are what scoop had been empty. My mother and father had Mustangs travel on."

not been there. I doubted that Loren's mother As soon as she said it I could see how sensible it would be in her house. But I wasn't sure.

was. Of course. This way the human "cars"

<Don't expect too much,> I warned.

—which is how, Loran informed me, humans

"She'll be there," Loren said forcefully. "Next commonly refer to these machines — would not house. The one with the bushes out front." damage tasty grass.

I had very little experience understanding the On both sides of the street there were cars expression of human voices, but I sensed fear in sitting. Beyond the cars, further back from the Loren's voice. Uncertainty.

street were rectangular boxy structures. They were I stopped before her house. There was a very atquite large and decorated with small squares and tractive patch of grass in the front. Obviously, hurectangles of transparent material. The tops were mans grow their own food in neatly cultivated angled and covered in reddish-orange or dark gray squares in front of each house.

scales.

<You must have very hardy grasses to be able to

<Are these human creations?>

feed whole families and still look so perfect and so

"Yep. These are houses. That's what we live in." green.>

<You live *in* them? How?>

"What?" Loren asked.

"Urn, well . . . I mean, you go in through the She frowned and I let the matter drop. I was sure front door. See? The tall rectangles on the front of now that she was worried. She slid from my back. each house? You go in through those."

<I'll wait while you go inside your hollow

<Inside.>

house,> I said.

"Yes, inside."

"No. Come with me, Elfangor. Hold my hand."

<Ah! Wait! You mean these structures are *hol*- I held her hand and she walked up a series of *low*!>

four steps. I wondered about the steps. Were they a

"Of course they're hollow. Pretty soon we'll be way to slow down any approaching enemy, so that to my house. Then I'll show you. You'll meet my no one could charge directly inside the hollow mom. You can see my room."

house?

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With her free hand Loren twisted a metallic ball. are very partial to rectangles. The floor was smooth The door opened a little and Loren pushed it open here, and slippery for my hooves.

all the way.

Loren was wrapped in the arms of another human. She was correct. The house was hollow inside. In fact, this new human was also female, as far as I could tell. She had hair the same color as Loren's, no more than a few inches thick. But inside the dark brown eyes. Perhaps that was a sign of hollowness were other walls, with other doors. It age. Perhaps humans have blue eyes till a certain was like a maze!

Or until they reproduce and have children. Lights glowed from the flat covering above us. I wanted to ask Loren if my guess was correct, Other lights were hung on the walls. The floor was but Loren's mother was looking at me with her covered with a sort of very short, pale tan grass. I brown eyes.

tried to taste some of it, but my hooves could not

"Loren, honey, shouldn't you introduce your eat it.
friend?"

"Mom?" Loren said in a loud, quavering voice. Loren frowned. She looked at me, then back at

"I'm in here, honey."

her mother. "Mom, this is Elfangor. Don't be afraid, I felt Loren's hand jerk in surprise. Then she let okay? He's my friend."

go of my hand and ran along the strange

The human woman smiled. "Now, why would I inedible tan grass and turned out of sight through a be afraid? I like meeting your friends. You know rectangular opening.

that."

I followed slowly, unsure of myself. I did not

"But . . . Mom . . . Elfangor's not exactly one of know any human rituals. I knew what I would have my school friends."

said when first meeting an Andalite friend's parents,

"I like meeting your friends."

but I'd never met a human's parents.

Loren's face was growing pale. She darted

I heard Loren sob. "Mommy!"

worried eyes at me and back to her mother.

I turned the corner and looked into another of

"Mom, can't you tell that Elfangor is not a normal the mazelike rooms. This room had metallic devices friend from school? Can't you tell that he's against one wall, all rectangular and white. Humans different?"

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"Oh, honey." The woman laughed. "He's just But Loren did not want to be comforted. She an Andalite like any other."

threw off my hand. She turned to me with her face Loren jumped back like she'd been slapped. I red, and water flowing from her blue eyes. And she swept the room with my stalk eyes, ready for screamed. "Get away from me! Get away from me!

trouble. I cocked my tail and waited, tense and This is all your fault! Just leave me alone!" confined in the narrow room with the slippery floor. She pushed past me and ran from the hollow

"What do you mean, he's an Andalite? You house, sobbing loudly.

don't know about Andalites! You *can't* know about I was alone with the artificial mockery of a huAndalites." man woman. <I am sorry.>

Loren's mother made a face. "You know, just be"Would you like some pop and cookies?" the cause I'm your mother doesn't mean I'm an human woman asked.

antique! I do keep up with things, Miss Modern.

<No, thank you,> I said. I wondered what I Your generation thinks it invented *everything*. You should do. I didn't know how to comfort a human think you kids invented Andalites? We had

girl who is trapped inside a nightmare. <Loren's Andalites when I was your age, too."

mother, can you show me where Loren's room is?>

"How do you know about Andalites?!" Loren

"Up the stairs, on the right. But leave the door yelled. There was water leaking from her eyes. "Oh, open a crack. That's the rule in our house when God, you're not real! You're not real!" Loren has Andalites over to play."

"Now, Loren, if you are going to treat me disrespectfully, I am going to send you to your room."

"You're not my mother! You're not *real*!" I placed a hand on Loren's shoulder. By now I had learned that humans like to be touched when they are upset. <Loren, you're right. She is not your mother. She's something you made out of your own thoughts and memories of your mother. She knows about Andalites because you knew about Andalites when you imagined her.>

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chapter 40

I opened one of them. There were words printed on the pages but the words stopped abruptly in the middle of the book. Of course. Loren had not finished the book. So she could not recreate it out of her memory.

There was a small picture of Loren with two other people. All were making human smiles. One I felt that Loren needed a little time alone. It was her mother. The other I believed was male. was dangerous letting her walk around by herself. Perhaps her father.

But I couldn't force her to talk to me when she was I took this picture and held it in my hand. angry and afraid.

I looked around the room, trying to understand I had to climb many stairs to reach Loren's room. I this alien girl. But alien things are hard to make still didn't understand the point of stairs. I guess sense of.

humans just love anything with straight edges and a By the time I got out of the hollow house and rectangular shape. The stairs were definitely rectanback to the street, Loren was gone from sight. I gular. And they allowed the humans to place a secworried about finding her. But after wandering the ond level in their houses. This made the house a alien landscape for a while, I heard a far-off sound. larger rectangle. And I suppose this is important in

A THWACK!

some way.

I ran at top speed to the sound and found

Inside Loren's room was a long rectangle covLoren in a field of short grass and dirt. She ered with artificial skin. I suspect she used it for stood with her back to a high wire cage. In her sleeping. I had seen that when she slept, she lay flat right hand she held a sort of l o n g , s h a p e d and stretched out straight. There were two other stick, wider at the far end. With her left she tossed flat rectangles, one mostly covered with bound paa round white sphere up in the air. And then, pers. The bound papers were called books or quickly c l a s p i n g the stick with both h a n d s , magazines. Loren had explained them to me. A sort she swung the stick till it struck the falling white of extremely primitive computer file.

sphere.

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The result was fascinating. The sphere went fly<This all seems very bizarre to you. Me as ing through the air.

well.>

Loren watched the sphere until it fell to the

"Bizarre? My neighborhood with no people in grass, perhaps a hundred feet away. Then she it? My mom sounding like a dimwit robot but reached down into a bucket by her feet, lifted out a knowing things she can't possibly know? The sky in second, identical sphere, and repeated the entire patches?"

process.

<Is that humor?>

<Loren!>

"It's sarcasm," she said. We reached one of the She ignored my approach.

white balls. She picked it up and used the stick to Toss . . . swing . . . THWACK!

knock it back toward the tall wire cage.

The sphere flew over the grass and landed at the I held the small picture out for her to see. <I got edge of a narrow band of trees.

this from your room. I thought you might like someToss ... swing ... THWACK!

thing personal. I don't know if we will be able to go

<Loren?>

back to your house. >

"See, *this* is softball," she said, without looking

"That is *not* my house," she said. But she took at me. "See that high spot there? That's the the picture and stared at it. Her face seemed to pitcher's mound. The pitcher throws the ball across grow softer. Her mouth corners became more nearly this plate. The batter swings and tries to knock the level. Her forehead skin grew less wrinkled. "Elfanstitches off her." gor, what is happening here?"

<Off the pitcher?>

<What you said earlier, more or less. I think that Toss . . . swing ... THWACK!

in order to direct the Time Matrix you need to form

"That was my last ball. I'd better go retrieve a mental image of where and when you want to go. them. Our coach goes ape if we lose equipment." We couldn't do that because all three of us were She started off across the field, still carrying her fighting for control. We each — you, me, Visser shaped stick.

Thir ty - tw o ha di de a s of w he re to go . Yo u

<You are upset,> I said.

wanted your home. I wanted mine. I guess he

"What was your first clue?"

wanted his. Nobody's vision was complete. We k 269

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were all freezing and suffocating for lack of air. The grass and the trees and the air all like they should Time Matrix did the best it could.>

be?"

"I thought it was supposed to be a time ma<Because a person ... whether it's an Andalite chine."

or a human, is a thousand times more complicated I sighed. <Some people believe that there is not than a tree.>

just one universe, but many. Maybe, somehow, inI noticed that Loren was not looking at me. Instead of traveling through the time and space of our stead she was staring alertly into the woods. own universe, we forced the Time Matrix to create a

<Do you see something?>

whole new universe. When the three of us wrestled

"No. I ... I have a feeling, is all. I have to go for control, the Time Matrix could not make sense look."

of what we were asking it to do. So it created this I followed her through the woods. We traveled place.>

no more than fifty feet when we reached what Loren resumed walking toward the far edge of Loren had sensed.

the field. She stooped to pick up another ball and The trees stopped abruptly. The sky above

knocked it back in the direction we'd come from. us s t o p p e d , t o o . The ground a n d the grass

"So my mom. My mother ... she's just made up all stopped. Just stopped. And beyond it was blank out of my memories."

whiteness.

<And even then, not all your memories. She is The pure, blank, white of Zero-space. Nothingnot complete. She is bits and pieces of your memoness. ries of her. I think the more complicated things, like I felt awed and frightened all at once. We were sentient creatures, are probably the most likely to be standing at the edge of our tiny universe. Loren incomplete.>

reached toward the whiteness, stretching her hand Loren made a snorting sound. "Great universe, out beyond the edge of soil and vegetation, air and isn't it?"

sky.

<That was sarcasm, too?>

Her arm reached that edge and curved back on

"Yeah. That was sarcasm, too."

itself. It simply bent in a perfect arc, so that her hand We had reached the trees. Loren plunged in. was reaching back toward her own face.

"Look how complete all the trees are. Why are the

"N00000000!" she screamed. "No! No! No!" 271

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chapter 41

<Loren, it's only . . .> Only what? What could I say to comfort her when I felt my own mind spinning out of control?

She turned to me, eyes wide and reddish now. "I want to go home, Elfangor. I want to go home! This place is wrong. It's wrong!"

<I know. I feel it, too.>

"We have to get out of here. This place can't exist. We wandered around the edge of our new uniFeel it. It's wrong!" verse, keeping the blank whiteness on our right as

<We have to find the Time Matrix,> I said. <It's the we went.

only way. But we don't know where it is. And Visser We traveled along the outer rim of the Earth portion Thirty-two will try to stop us.>

of the universe. But even there at the outer rim, this She was still holding the shaped stick. The softball new universe was not consistent. As we walked we stick. She looked at me with cold fury in her blue came across small areas, sometimes no more than human eyes. And I saw something there that almost twenty feet across, where we'd suddenly find Andalite scared me.

life-forms or Yeerk life-forms. The Andalite patches She clutched the stick tightly. "Let him try and stop were harder to notice since they were not so different us. Let him try."

from the Earthlike areas. But the patches of Yeerk environment were like open sores.

We skirted around the Yeerk patches. Most of the Earth environment was made up of woods and grass fields. But here and there were human buildings as

well. We saw the street where Loren lived. And *we* saw her school — a squat, ugly box made of thousands of small reddish-brown rectangles called bricks. 272
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"I can't believe I brought the school building into any normal human. Except that his face was covthis universe, but I forgot to bring a grocery store." ered with red splotches and pustules. And he had no

<What is a grocery store?>

eyes. No eyes at all.

"A place to buy food."

But he could speak.

<Aft> I had seen Loren eat aboard the *Jahar*; of

"Welcome to McDonald's. May I take your orcouse. She and the other human had eaten emerder?" gency rations of liquefied grass. The rations we give

"Oh, no. No," Loren wailed.

Andalites who are too sick or injured to stand up and

"Would you like fries with that? Or a hot apple pie?" eat normally.

<Is this a human you know?> I asked.

We walked along a street that appeared in the

"No. I mean, yes. He's this guy who works at middle of a field. The street merely began, ran for a few McDonald's and he always waits on us when we go for hundred feet, and ended. It made Loren anxious, I burgers after a game. My friend Jennifer says he likes could tell. She explained that the street didn't belong me. But all I ever notice is how bad his acne is. The poor there.

guy. The poor guy."

But then we saw a building decorated with two

<The food he has may still be real,> I suggested. <It yellow arcs. would help you to eat some human food.>

"Can't be!" Loren gasped. "No way! It's Mickey D's! I She seemed ready to run from the place. But in the brought a McDonald's here!"

end, hunger won out over horror. Loren steeled herself She broke into a run and I followed her. We entered and walked back to the eyeless human.

the hollow building. Inside there was a single human.

"Welcome to McDonald's. May I take your orBut he was not like any human I had ever seen. der?"

"Oh, God, what did I do?" Loren cried. She

"Yes. I mean . . . yes. I'd like a Big Mac, fries, and placed her hand over her mouth.

a Coke."

I had never seen this human gesture, but I knew she

"That'll be four dollars and nineteen cents." Loren was horrified. You see, the human looked like hesitated. But then she reached into a flap of her artificial skin and pulled out some crumpled

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pieces of paper and some round metallic objects. me, and I'd hate to think what kind of mess I'd have She handed all this to the eyeless human.

made of some of them."

Somehow the human managed to take the paI didn't understand what she was talking per and metal. Although how he did it without eyes about, but I understood that she was feeling was a mystery. This universe we had created had better. I gazed up at the weird, patchy sky, and strange rules.

around at the disjointed landscape. Then, suddenly, The eyeless human placed several objects into a it hit me.

bag. They smelled strange and foul to me. But Loren

<It's a multidimensional pattern!> I said. looked in the bag and smiled.

"Huh?" Loren asked, attempting to form words,

"Well, I did one thing right when I created this even though her mouth was filled with twouniverse. I put extra pickles on the Big Macs. Come inch-long, pale yellow sticks called "french fries." o n . Let's go back outside. I don't want to eat

<The sky, the way little bits of Andalite and with . . . with *him*."

Yeerk environments are mixed in with Earth envi"Enjoy your meal, and come again!" the sad ronments. And probably the other way around, too. monstrosity said.

I didn't see it at first, but there is a pattern. It just We went back outside and Loren found a place seems strange because it makes sense in higher dito sit on the grass and began to devour her food. mensions, but not in three dimensions. But I am sure Watching creatures with mouths eat can be disturbnow. It's a hyper spiral.> ing. Especially when you discover some of the Loren swallowed. "A what?"

things they eat. Between huge gulping, slobbering

<A spiral. But in extra dimensions. And if I'm bites with her flashing white teeth and grinding right . . . yes! The Time Matrix will be at the center jaws, Loren told me what a "Big Mac" was. I'd of the spiral!>

rather not have known.

"Which is where?" Now Loren was sucking liqBut the human food revived Loren. She had her uid into her mouth through a tube that inserted into old energy back. And even her sense of humor. a cylinder filled with brown water.

"At least I didn't try and recreate the cheerlead<I'm not sure. But I think I can find it. And if I ing squad in this universe," she said. "They rejected can find

it, so can that Yeerk!>

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chapter 42

Loren jumped up. "That's why he hasn't tried to track us down. He's after the Time Matrix! Let's go. Let's go!"

<You seem to have recovered.>

Loren pointed at the cylinder of liquid. "Sugar rush, Elfangor. Let's go before it wears off." **I led the way toward what I hoped was the center of this universe.** The patches of sky grew more v a r i e d over our h e a d s . And the patches of different environments grew more numerous. Soon we were walking through a place that was only half Earth, with the rest divided between gentle Andalite countryside and harsh Yeerk lands.

"I like your planet, from what I've seen of it," Loren said. "It's like Earth, only without the houses and buildings. But you must have cities and all somewhere. I mean, you build spaceships. You have incredible technology."

<Long ago we had cities,> I explained. <But we were free-roaming herd animals to begin with. I m e a n , t h a t ' s h o w w e e v o l v e d . M i l l i o n s o f y e a r s a g o A n d a l i t e s m o v e d i n v a s t h e r d s , w h i c h w o u l d s p l i t o f f i n t o s m a l l e r h e r d s a t d i f f e r e n t t i m e s o f t h e y e a r . T h e n , g r a d u a l l y , w e g o t u s e d t o f o r m i n g s m a l l e r h e r d s . F a m i l i e s , r e a l l y .

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Each family made its scoop, and we each held ers. Another family builds the pieces from our deour own g r a z i n g l a n d s . A l l t h i s A n d a l i t e s i g n s . A n o t h e r f a m i l y t r a n s p o r t s t h e p i e c e s t o t h e e n v i r o n m e n t y o u s e e i s p a r t o f m y f a m i l y ' s

spaceport. I guess the three spaceports are about as grazing land.>

close as we come to what you would call a city We came to a patch of Yeerkish territory

now.>

and skirted around the blackened vegetation

"We're very different, aren't we?" Loren said. and sluggish pools. On the other side was a She sounded sad.

wide band of Andalite land which we walked

<Yes. In some ways. But not so very different in through.

others.>

<Once we evolved to form families, we began to

"When all this is done, you'll go back to your study science and nature. And again, over millions planet. go back to mine. And you'll erase all my of years, we learned to build things. You know —

memories of this."

weapons and vehicles that let us fly over the I was startled by the idea.

<Loren, we no longer l a n d . And communicators for extending the have the Jahar. Or any ship. I can't erase your memreach of thought-speak. Scoops became larger. ories without that technology.>

Families joined with other families. Building

"But if you could, you would?"

g r e w . Soon we had thousands of Andalites I hadn't thought about it. But suddenly I realized all crammed together without enough grazing the t r u t h . It shocked me. <No. I wouldn't.> " s p a c e . But w e w e r e l e a r n i n g s p a c e t r a v e l Why not?"

at the same time. Still, we weren't happy. We

<Because . . . because I don't think after all that's knew something was wrong. We broke down

happened I could stand to be the only person alive our cities, divided the land, and went back to life who knew the truth. And I don't think I could stand in simple family scoops. We kept building

having you forget me, Loren.>

spaceships, but we did it in little bits and Loren nodded. She smiled. "I care about you, pieces, here and there, spread out through the too, Elfangor. I care a lot."

tens of thousands of scoops. My own family

I was puzzled. Had I said I cared about her?

does some of that. We design heat transfer

N o . Not in those w o r d s . And yet I d i d . I did components for fight281 care about this alien who no longer seemed so pen before. It licked the air, searching for us, but alien.

these creatures or plants — or whatever they were —

<We would be able to move faster if you

were used to slower prey. I easily stepped out of its climbed on my back as you did before,> I sugrange. gested.

A pall settled over us as we crossed a landscape

"I guess we would."

that seemed designed to be depressing. And then, She climbed on my back and I set off at a

at last, we reached good Andalite grass again. Grass r u n . I w a s c o n f i d e n t n o w t h a t I k n e w t h e and trees and the scoop of a friend I had known all pattern of this universe. And I was fairly sure my life.

that we would find the Time Matrix at the very

"Is that your home?"

center of the s w i r l . But w o u l d we f i n d that

<No. It's the scoop of a friend's family.> " Visser Thirty-two had solved the puzzle before Maybe your friend is around."

us?

<That's what scares me. Your mother . . . that The different environments were broken into McDonald person . . . I don't want to see my friend smaller and smaller patches, and now there was a that way.>

roughly equal amount of each of the three planets. Suddenly I stumbled. My right forehoof had

It became more and more difficult to go around the caught on a rock.

Yeerk areas.

"Elfangor! Elfangor! Something is happenWe came to one Yeerk area that stretched d i i n g ! " L o r e n c r i e d . "My f i n g e r n a i l s ! T h e y ' r e r e c t l y across our p a t h . <I think we should go growing!"

through it,> I said.

She held up her hands so that my back-turned I stepped gingerly into the Yeerk area. Instantly stalk eyes could see them. The hard portion at the air was warmer, almost stifling. Humidity shot the end of her human fingers had grown half an up so that my fur clung to me.

inch.

I closed my hooves to the sparse Yeerk vegeta<Your hair is growing, too,> I said. tion. I didn't trust those dark red plants. A bright She felt it. "My God, it's grown an inch. It's like it tongue shot up from the ground, as I had seen hapwould grow in a few weeks!" 283

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<My hooves are growing, too. That's why I I looked at Loren and had to stop myself from tripped. It's something I was afraid of. As we get crying out. Her fingernails were two inches long!

closer to the center of this swirl universe, time is acHer toenails were sticking through the fabric of her celerating. We are going to age faster than artificial hooves! And her golden hair was so long it normal.>

reached to the ground.

"Then we'd better hurry!"

She stumbled forward, pointing. "Look!

I redoubled my speed, careful to lift my scruffy Look!"

hooves well clear on each step.

I had already seen what she was just noticing: The entire false universe was coming the swirling tornado that was the very center of together now. There were no longer clearly difour universe. It was a vortex, a tornado made up ferent patches of Andalite, human, or Yeerk of the very substance of our three worlds. Sky terrain. Trees and grass, scoop and house,

and soil and living things all swirled insanely around and sludgy natural Yeerk pools all seemed to meld us.

together.

"Look out!" Loren ducked her head as someIt was like walking through a surreal nightmare. thing that looked like a human house, twisted and The sky itself seemed to swoop down, to gather and stretched, whipped by us.

swirl in patterns of dark blue, light blue, and

<The Time Matrix! It should be in there!> I cried. " lightning-wracked green.

In *there*? How can we go in there? It's impossible!"

"Okay, now this is weird," Loren said. But her

<It's the only way. The Time Matrix is either in voice, too, seemed to swirl into patterns that made there or . . . or there's nothing beyond that swirl but it sound musical and strange.

emptiness and we'll be trapped inside that vortex I tripped and fell forward, throwing Loren

forever.>

free. My hooves had become totally unmanageable.

"Nice choice," Loren said. "And by the way, that I whipped my tail blade forward and quickly was sarcasm, too."

trimmed my hooves. It was a rough job, and as soon

<Yes, I'm beginning to recognize it,> I said. as I had cut away the excess, they began growing

< We have to close our eyes. Block out again.

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chapter 43

everything you see, or think you see, and dive in.>

"Take my hand, Elfangor."

I did. And together we pushed forward into a vortex made up of the very substance of time and space. A swirl of raw space-time.

Into the vortex.

I had no idea what I would find inside that awesome swirl. But then, I had long ago given up thinking I knew what would happen next. Everything had been a surprise since that day, not at all long ago, when Arbron and I were called to see the captain on the bridge of the *StarSword*. Loren and I pushed forward. There was a feeling of resistance, as if a strong wind was holding us back. But at the same time, I felt that this resistance could be overcome.

The wind stopped and instead we were drawn forward. Drawn deep into the vortex. Everything swirled and swam around me. Vision was wild and distorted and filled with insane colors and bits and pieces of floating, oddly shaped matter.

Trees and buildings and creatures that seemed solid simply blew through us as if they were ghosts. Or as if *we* were ghosts.

And then we were through. In an instant, the swirling stopped. We were standing on a flat, featureless

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area no more than a hundred feet across. The four Mortrons wheeled their way into the vortex. There was no vegetation. There was no detail. The vortex and came panting beside the visser. The sky was blanked out by the swirl that raged above Yeerk looked around, as if searching for a weapon. and around us.

He stared at the Time Matrix while keeping his stalk

"The eye of the hurricane," Loren whispered. eyes on me.

I didn't understand what she said, but I understood "Elfangor," I heard Loren moan. stood what we both felt. We had penetrated a storm I swept one stalk eye toward her and almost storm that twisted time and space.

cried out. Her hair was now so long that it piled on And there, standing alone and pristine, was the the ground. And her toenails extended nearly a foot Time Matrix. A simple, off-white sphere that had through the fabric of her artificial hooves. Her hands the power to create this eerie universe from our were like hideous claws.

own imperfect thoughts.

<Stand perfectly still,> I said. <Hold out your

<We did it,> I marveled. <The Time Matrix! It is hands and don't move them.>

here!>

FWAPP! FWAPP! FWAPP! FWAPP!

"Yeah. Now what do we do about it? Look at With four quick tail swipes I cut most of the finmy hair. Look at my fingernails. The distortion is reger and toenail away. At the same time I kept my ally strong here, close like this."

main eyes on the visser. He was watching me

<Yes. But we'll be fine once we contact the Maclosely. Sizing me up. trix and get out of here.>

<I suppose we'll have to agree to work together From the swirl wall I saw a head emerge, pressagain,> he said. ing forward into the empty field.

<The same thing would happen,> I s a i d . An Andalite head.

<Another c o m p r o m i s e d u n i v e r s e . No better

"It's him!"

than this one. Only this time we'd all be more The visser jerked in shock and amazement at careful to bring allies and weapons from our seeing the two of us there. <What? The Andalite memory.>

child and his pet? Still alive?>

The Yeerk visser shrugged. <At least then we'd

<Yes, still alive,> I said.

have a fair fight.>

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"He doesn't want to fight you one-on-one," It had come down to this. To a tail fight to the Loren said.

death between me and Visser Thirty-two. I tried to

<No, he'd rather have a host of allies and recall everything Old Sofor, my fighting trainer, had weapons,> I agreed.

taught me. But I couldn't remember a thing. But Loren shook her head, which caused a ripple The Mortrons launched their bird portions. Leather through

the massive pile of her golden hair. "No, it's wings spread wide and vicious mouths wider still. I more than that. He's afraid to fight you one-on-one had to take them out of the fight without cutting one. I saw it in his face."

them. If I cut them in pieces they would simply reThe idea seemed ludicrous. Loren liked me and generate.

assumed I was the better fighter. But that was no

SWOOP!

way to judge. Visser Thirty-two had the body *and* FWAPP! I struck! But at the last second I turned mind of Alloran. All of Alloran's speed and my blade aside and hit the Mortron with the flat side of the blade.

experience.

"He *is* afraid, Elfangor," Loren insisted. THWACK! The bird portion went flying. It fell to

<Afraid of *what*?> the visser laughed. <Of this the ground and didn't move. I had knocked it out. Andalite child? My Mortrons and I will annihilate Two bird portions went for Loren, jagged teeth him!>

glistening from their long mouths. She swung her softball bat but missed. The bat fell from her hands

"Really? So why not do it? Why talk about as a Mortron bird portion slapped her head with its working *t o g e t h e r* ? " Loren turned to m e . " wings.

Al-loran has seen you tail fight, Elfangor. That knowledge is the visser's now, right? That's One of the Mortrons was still after me, and as he swooped the visser attacked.

why he's scared."

Mortron and Andalite tail struck at me.

The Yeerk stared hatred at Loren. <I'll be sure to kill you slowly, human.> He shot a glance at the four

<Aaarrggghh!> The Mortron ripped a gash in the Mortrons. <Kill!> he yelled suddenly. side of my head, barely missing my stalk eyes! My own blood *s p u r t e d* , and then the visser's tail The Mortrons powered their wheels and came

was . . .

for us. The visser was right behind them.

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Blocked! FWAPP! I knocked his blow aside.

He blocked my blow. I struck again!

FWAPP! He struck again!

FWAPP! A hit!

I dodged beneath the blow and fired my own
<Aaaahhhh!> the visser moaned in pain. tail, but my aim was thrown off by the Mortron, But my own Mortron hit me without warning. A who twisted back and came at me again.

painful slice of my right rear haunch.

"No! No! No, you don't!" I heard Loren cry. Then I saw a frightening thing. Loren's strong She was under attack from the other two Morhuman hands were choking the life from the Mortron trons! I saw bright red human blood. But if I tried to bird portion. And her fingernails, growing so fast help her, the visser would kill me before I could so that I could actually see them grow, were growing much as twitch.

into the Mortron.

It was impossible!

FWAPP! The visser struck.

FWAPP! The visser struck, and this time the blow I parried and turned my parry into a thrust! <Yes!

hit home. I saw a line drawn through the skin of my

> I exulted as my tail blade plunged deep into the chest. The line opened to become a gash.

visser's left arm.

FWAPP! He struck! I parried the blow, but barely. But the remaining Mortron was coming back

<Ah, not so fast after all, are you, Andalite?> the around, aiming straight for my face this time. With a visser crowed.

sneer, the visser struck.

In seconds the fight would be over. I knew it. I Mortron teeth and the Yeerk's stolen Andalite had lost. Loren was probably already done for. tail blade flew at me.

But then, through one twisted stalk eye, I saw I could stop only one.

Loren. To my astonishment she had her two strong But whichever strike got through, bird or blade, human hands wrapped around the neck of one of would finish me.

the Mortron bird portions.

She was choking it! And the other Mortron was tangled in the wild mess of her hair.

<This fight isn't over yet, Visser!> I said, and I struck!

FWAPP!

chapter 44

seemed almost ridiculously weak, tottering around on their two legs, having to make sounds to communicate, lacking anything in the way of tail or other defenses.

But humans had some definite possibilities.

<Nice throw,> I said.

"It's called a pitch," Loren said. She smiled. " **The Mortron flew at me!**

Thanks."

The visser's blade split the air, aiming at my

<Your Mortrons are done for, Visser,> I said to head!

him. <It's just you and me now. Tail-to-tail.> Something moving! To my left, not fast by AnThe Yeerk slug called Visser Thirty-two glared dalite standards, but fast enough.

hatred at me through his stolen Andalite eyes. <You Loren spun the dead Mortron in her hand

think you've won, Andalite? You think you can kill around and threw it with all her might. The Mortron me now? Guess again. You haven't thought it slipped off the end of Loren's claw fingernails. It through. But then again, I have the advantage of flew through the air and hit the other Mortron head adding Alloran's Andalite knowledge to my own. on.

What do you think will happen to whoever is left

"Softball!" Loren yelled.

behind in this universe once it is broken apart?> The Mortron that had been attacking me was

I had to struggle to think. An artificial u n i knocked down. I swept my tail blade right to left verse . . . composed of the thoughts and memories and knocked the visser's blade away. It came within of three different individuals . . .

a hair of my face.

<What? Over your head, is it? A collapsed time Loren calmly picked up her softball bat from the line returns us each to our own proper space-time spot where it had fallen. And she annihilated the last location.>

Mortron, the one that had been tangled in her hair.

<So you go back to the Jahar. Back to being I think it was that very moment when I decided I sucked into a black hole. I can live with that, Yeerk. could definitely get to like humans. At first they I don't care how you die. Here, from my tail. 294

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Or there, drawn helplessly into a black hole. So We have to go somewhere real. Somewhere that is long as you die. You are an abomination. The a part of the true universe.>

first Andalite-Controller. I just want you to be the

"The Andalite world?"

last.>

<No,> I said heavily. <What would I do if I went

"I told you he was scared to fight you," Loren back to my own people? I mutinied against Alloran, said.

my prince. I left Arbron behind to live as a Taxxon.

<I guess you were right.>

And I know too many secrets. I know that my own The visser hesitated. But I knew he would walk people did use a Quantum virus in the Hork-Bajir away. I could feel his resolve failing. But his malice, war. What might they do if they suddenly had the his evil remained as strong as ever.

Time Matrix?>

<The day will come, Elfangor, when I will destroy

"I guess sometimes even good people do bad you. I will make it personal. I will make it very perthings. I mean, that's what war is all about, isn't it?" sonal.>

<If we use the Time Matrix to win this war we Then he turned and plunged back into the vorwill no longer be Andalites. Not what I think of as tex wall.

Andalites, anyway. We have to win this war by

"That's the end of him."

being ourselves. By living up to our own standards,

<No. I don't think so,> I said. I won't say I had a not by becoming as brutal and ruthless as the vision. I don't believe much in supernatural things. Yeerks are.>

But I felt deep down that the visser and I would find

"You mean what's the point of winning, if by our time lines entwined again someday.

winning you lose what you were fighting for."

"So now what? We have to get out of here fast.

<Yes. That's exactly what I mean. I can't give my My hair is still growing. My nails are out of control. I people the Time Matrix. And I can't let the Yeerks

feel like I'm getting older. My . . . well, I'm getting have it, either. And it cannot be destroyed, only hidolder, I'll leave it at that. But I swear I'm suddenly den.> eighteen!"

Loren looked strangely at me. "You're going to

<Yes. Your face is changing. And I, too, feel myhide it on Earth?" self changing. We must leave. But this time there

<Earth. Yes. And this time no nosy, greedy Skrit can only be one person directing the Time Matrix. Na will stumble across it.>

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"What do you want me to do?"

<Yes. But imagine that they don't. Imagine that

<Imagine your Earth, your home, just as it is toyou are eighteen and that everyone who has ever day. Picture every last detail. Your mother. Your known you expects you to be eighteen.>

friends. Your hollow human house. Picture the time

"Is this really going to work?"

just after the Skrit Na took y o u . An hour after<I don't know, Loren. Nothing else I've tried has ward.>

worked so far.>

"That was like, what, a week ago? Did all this She smiled with her human mouth. "Then I'll happen in just a week?"

take care of driving the Time Matrix. Let's go."

<Yes. Just a week. And we need to go back in She placed her hands against the Time Matrix time. Back before your mother would have noticed and closed her eyes.

you missing. But not before the Skrit Na took you or The swirl tightened around us, and I saw images flash by. Images of a planet I had never visited, but we would undo this entire time line.>

already knew and cared for.

"Maybe we *should* erase this time line. Save Arbron. Save Alloran." And then we were a million light-years, and one week, away.

<And the two of us never meet?>

"I wouldn't want that."

<Me neither. But more importantly, we wouldn't know the exact effects of rewriting all that history. It may mean the Skrit Na escaped clean with the Time Matrix and delivered it to the Yeerks. No. We have to keep our time line intact. And as long as the you you've been this last week doesn't encounter some second *you*, we'll be fine.>

"There's one more p r o b l e m . This *me* has aged. I'm older. I must be almost eighteen now, judging from the way I've grown. People would notice."

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chapter 45

And it was hard being a human. I missed my stalk eyes. I missed my tail terribly. But I didn't want to fight anymore. I was done with the war. Sick to death of it.

Besides, there were good things about being a human. The human sense of taste is wonderful. Almost overpowering. And then there was Loren. She had recreated her *Three years later* . .

own life to deal with the fact that she had aged several years. She went back to a mother who never I ran away from the great war of Yeerk against knew she had been gone. Back to friends and family Andalite.

who all expected her to be the age she now was. I ran away and hid on the planet called Earth. I The power of the Time Matrix is awesome. I had buried the Time Matrix in a patch of woods. I perseen what it could do, and I was more convinced formed a *Frolis Maneuver*: the mixing of different than ever that it could not be given to either side in DNA to form a single morph. I found ways to come a terrible, bloody war. Desperate people do desperin contact with humans and absorb bits of several ate, evil things.

DNA patterns. And when I had enough, I morphed I finished college at an accelerated rate. Not sura human for the first time. prising, since I was a century or two ahead of all the And for the last time. You see, I was done with professors. I began graduate school. But I was bored the fight. I had done all I could, and I had made a there, too.

mess of things. My people would be better off withI had a job writing software for primitive human out me. And there was no way to hide over the long computers. It was the 1980s on Earth and humans term. I had to become a human. And stay a human. were just beginning to understand computers. I attended a human college. I majored in physics. I met a lot of humans who were working in

It was hard. Hard to pretend not to know all the anthe computer field. My human friend Bill used swers instantly. I had to pretend to struggle with t o c o m

e o v e r t o m y r o o m a n d w e w o u l d equations I had known perfectly since childhood. exchange ideas. It was hard for me to simplify my 300

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knowledge enough for him to follow. Everything We had come to care about each other on our had to be explained in simple human terms, using adventure. And when she was ready by human words like "window" to explain a childishly simple standards, I married her. concept.

And I really thought that I had left everything And my human friend Steve thought it was a

behind me. I thought that I was a human now. That huge breakthrough to use symbolic icons and a simEarth would be my home. That I would remain far, ple pointer rather than a lot of complex language. far away from the terrible space battles that raged One day I got a terrible shock. I saw Chapman at across the galaxy, around stars so distant I could not the college. I was with Loren at the time. Chapman even find them in Earth's night sky.

did not recognize her. He did not know her at all. I left my own people. My own species. And I It made no sense. We had left Chapman back on was human . . . except in the dreams where I the *Jahar*, tumbling toward a black hole. He should would run across the open grass and speak to the have been swallowed by the black hole, crushed trees and whip my tail around for the simple joy and annihilated.

of it.

Loren tested him. She went up to him and said, " We got a house. What I used to call a hollow Hello, Chapman. Heard from your old friend Visser house. Now I understood human things.

Thirty-two lately?"

I drove a car. A yellow Mustang like the one I'd He'd stared at her like she was confused. This driven on the Taxxon world. And I only thought of Chapman recalled nothing. His memory had been my own people, and my own family, and my own erased.

world some of the time. Not every minute.

I tried to put it out of my mind. I told myself Not *every* minute.

Chapman had a twin, or that it was some unknown I even took a human name. Alan Fangor. It was physics of black holes. But it nagged at me. From Loren's idea. See, humans shorten their names, just as Andalites do. So most people called me Al Fanthen on I felt a sense of being watched. And I wongor. dered if, or when, the power that had rewritten Chapman's memory would make itself known.

One day I drove my car home from my job and But the most important thing I did as a human parked it in the driveway. I could see that Loren was was to marry Loren.

not home. Her own car was not in the driveway. She 302

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had gone to see a doctor. Although human doctors He laughed. "You don't ask *who* I am. You ask were practically barbarians who could not even *what*. You are still wise enough to know I am not eliminate a simple tumor without cutting holes in a human."

person!

"Just tell me what you want," I snapped. I stepped out of the car on my two human legs.

"I don't want anything. *We* don't want anyIt turned out, much to my surprise, that I seldom fell thing. We do not interfere in the problems of other species."

over, even with just two legs.

I walked up the driveway to the door and

"We? Who is we?"

opened it, as I had done a thousand times before.

"The 'we' whose machine you have used to alter Only this time someone was standing in my living the direction of time and space."

room.

"Ellimist?" I whispered fearfully. He was a man. A human. Or so I thought. "What

"Yes. I am one of those creatures you call are you doing in here?" I demanded in angry Ellimists."

mouth sounds.

The man looked at me with amusement. I was good at reading human expressions now. "What am I doing here? What are you doing here?"

"I live here. This is my home." I was a little fearful. Human arms are strong and can be used for fighting. But whenever I sensed danger, I missed my tail. And I felt vulnerable, being unable to see behind me.

The man shook his head sadly. "Elfangor-SirinialShamtul, this is *not* your home." My knees weakened and I almost collapsed. I made it to the couch and sat down heavily. "What are you?" I asked.

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chapter 46

"He's alive. The visser."

"Yes. He is alive. He still inhabits Alloran's body." The Ellimist focused gray human-seeming eyes on me. "He is a terrible enemy of your people."

I shook my head. "Humans are my people **I couldn't believe it. I** now."

had never been sure I believed in Ellimists. I still wondered if it was some kind

"Like the human named Chapman? Is he one of of trick. He looked fully human. But of course, for a your people?

true Ellimist, such things are easy.

"You. It was you. You brought him back here

"Am I really an Ellimist?" the man asked, mockand erased his memory." ing.
"Let's see. I know that Arbron still lives in the

"I undid an error in the time-space continuum. tunnels of the Living Hive. I know that you made a Chapman plays a part in what is still to come." universe once, you and the human and the Yeerk

"I don't care," I said harshly. "I don't care about called Visser Three." wars in far-off space."

I jerked in surprise. "Visser *Three*?"

"Far off? Do you really think you are safe here,

"Yes, he's advanced quite far in the Yeerk hierarElfangor? Do you assume the Yeerks will never come?" chy."

I felt my throat clutching up. It happens to hu"He should be dead!" mans when they are upset or afraid. "Will they

"*Should* be dead? Do you really think you can come here?"

play games with time itself? Do you think you can change things around to suit you and not make a

"Elfangor, the first Yeerk advance scouts are in orbit above Earth right now."

mess of it? Are you so naive, Andalite, that you I said nothing for a long time. I looked out of the can't understand that time is a trillion, trillion, trillion window, expecting to see Loren's car pull up at any strands, all woven and interwoven? That if you twist moment. But then I realized what a fool I was

being. and break one strand it may have unforeseen effects If the Ellimist didn't want us to be interrupted, we in a thousand other places and times?" wouldn't be.

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"There's nothing I can do," I said at last. "I tried

"We do not interfere in the affairs of other my hand at being a hero. I failed." species."

"Failed? You kept the Time Matrix from falling

"Then go away! Get out! Leave me alone!" into the hands of either side, Yeerk or Andalite. You

"We do not interfere. But sometimes we repair saved the galaxy."

what has been shattered."

"I couldn't save Arbron. I helped destroy Moran I froze. What stupid game was he playing? He and deliver him to the Yeerks to create the abominawouldn't interfere, but he would? Which was it?

tion he became. I wasn't able to destroy that abomWhat did he want?

ination. I was weak. I was foolish."

"What do I want? Nothing. But I can tell you

"You refused to slaughter defenseless prisoners. that you have twisted and distorted time. Things are You refused to destroy yourself in order to win a not as they should be. Battles are lost that should have been won. What should be safe is now endanbattle. You are wise, for a primitive creature. But gered."

you also altered the course of time by using the Time Matrix. And that has created awful problems.

"I can't go back," I pleaded. "I'm not an Andalite anymore. I'm human! I have a wife. I have a For your people. For *both* your peoples. Your peoplace here." ples need you."

I laughed. "No one needs me."

"All a product of your meddling," the Ellimist said. "The human girl Loren was meant to marry a

"You are not *where* and *when* you should be, human. You were meant to be a warrior. A great hero Elfangor."

to your people. A mentor and guide to your brother."

"The galaxy will get along without me."

"I have a brother? He was born? I knew my The Ellimist leaned forward and put his face family was preparing —"

close to mine. "No. It won't."

"In this broken time line, no. But you *should*. He

"What do you want from me?!" I yelled, sudhas a job to do. And so does another person who denly enraged.

you do not even know exists. Elfangor, without you,

"We want nothing."

your people, both your peoples, will be slaves of the

"Liar! Why are you here if you don't want any Yeerks." thing?"

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I jumped back to my feet. "You're lying. Manip" Will you cross-examine me, Andalite? Or will ulating me. Using me."

you ask me to undo the mess you have made?" "

"We don't use anyone. We don't interfere. But if Loren . . . ?"

you ask me to fix the mess you have made . . . to

"Will never know you existed. But you will repair the time line so that you return to your know. You will still have your memories." destiny ... that, and that alone, I can do." I tried to smile, but it twisted cruelly on my lips. " I wanted to hit him. I wanted to throw up. I You said something about a battle, Ellimist . ." hated the galaxy and everything in it.

"Come. I will carry you there. I will undo what

"There is a battle, Elfangor. A turning point. was done, and repair the fabric of your fate, ElfanVisser Three is there. You are supposed to be there. gor."

Right now."

"I can't leave Loren."

"Listen to me, Elfangor. Visser Three will come to Earth one day. He remembers her. He remembers that she mocked him. Do you know what he will do to her? And will you be able to stop him, when he is surrounded by a thousand of his own troops?" I felt warm liquid run down my cheeks. Tears. A human thing.

"And if I go back . . . if I ask you to repair the time line . . . will it save Earth? Will it save the Andalites? And my Loren?"

"No. Not by itself. But what is impossible now will become possible again."

I looked at the creature who posed as a human. The creature who had the power to make entire solar systems disappear. "What game are you playing, Ellimist?"

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chapter 47

I saw a young Andalite who looked like I had once: so serious, so determined to prove himself. I heard his name in my mind: AximiliEsgarrouth-Isthill. *Hello, little brother*, I said silently. I saw Arbron, still alive on the Taxxon world. I felt his Taxxon hunger. But I also felt his Andalite Once, a long time before, I had explained to Loren what it must be like to see the universe as the pride.

Ellimists saw it. And now, as the Ellimist lifted me *Hello, Arbron. You have become the hero I always* up out of the everyday world of three dimensions of space and one of time, I saw what he saw. I saw Loren, and wrapped around her time

When I had used the Time Matrix I glimpsed the line now was another human who would be her lines of time interwoven. But now I saw a thousand more. I had been written out of her memory. It tore times more. It was beyond sight. Beyond sound. It at my heart to realize that I was now a stranger to was some new sense, some new awareness.

her.

I could feel the lines of time flowing through me. And yet, I saw that some part of my own time I could see and taste and hear and touch and smell a line still intersected her own. I still touched her billion possibilities, all flowing through me. future in some way. My line and hers converged, I saw the Ellimist himself, as he really was. An instant then from those two lines came a new line, just describable being of light and time and space. emerging, just beginning to grow.

Huge, but without a place. Alone, but not the only

<What does it mean?> I asked the Ellimist. one of his kind. I saw and understood the vast YOU HAVE A SON, ELFANGOR.

power that trailed the lines of time through his In a flash I saw the truth. That's why Loren had grasped. And yet, against the enormity of all that had gone to see her doctor. She would have come home ever been and all that would ever be, I saw his and told me. We had a child!

limits, too.

<No! You can't take me away! I have a son!> I The Ellimist was mighty. But not all-powerful. cried. <That changes everything! Don't take me away!>

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YOU *ARE* AWAY, ELFANGOR-SIRINIAL-SHAMTUL. WHAT HOPE THAT WE WIN, ELFANGOR-SIRINIAL-SHAMTUL. HOPE WAS BROKEN HAS BEEN REPAIRED. YOU ARE WHERE YOU THAT WE WIN.

MUST BE. THE CHILD WILL BE RAISED AS THE SON OF ANI saw a battle ahead. OTHER.

I saw my own body twisting and changing

<But my son! What will happen to him? Will he shape. still . . . exist?>

I opened my stalk eyes. Tested my Andalite tail. I saw the tiny line that was my son flow off And all at once, I was on the bridge of an Anthrough time. I saw pain and hardship and dalite fighter.

loneliness for him.

But then, like a distant nova, I saw a flash of light, far at the edge of a still-uncertain future. Across the galaxy my brother's line reached to join with my son's. And four other bright, shining time lines formed together with those two.

I knew I was watching something incredible and important. And I knew this union of six time lines, one Andalite and five human, was the entire point of the Ellimist's "noninterference."

<So, you don't interfere with the affairs of other species?> I asked him.

WAS THAT SARCASM, ELFANGOR? the Ellimist asked. And then he laughed a huge laugh that

reverberated through all the tendrils of space and time.

<Is it all just a game for you?>

YES, the Ellimist said, all laughter silent now. BUT

WE ARE NOT THE ONLY GREAT POWERS OF THE GALAXY. THERE IS ANOTHER. OLDER EVEN THAN WE. AND HE PLAYS A DARK GAME, ANDALITE. IT IS WITH HIM THAT WE PLAY. SO

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chapter 48

<Separate the Dome! Give them two targets to deal with!>

And then, <To all fighters. This is the captain. We are beginning self-destruct sequence. Clear the area. If anyone is still alive out there, get clear of the *StarSword*. We will implode the engines and blow a hole in space. Maybe we can take some of those Bug I heard the chaotic thought-speak voices of cryfighters down with us. Self-destruct in three mining, dying Andalites in my head. utes,> he said heavily, and then added, <We have

<Main engines down, we have lost maneuvering done our duty.>
power!>

Now there was a new ship on my viewscreen. All

<We're at dead stop!>

black. Shaped like some ancient battle-ax.

<Break off! Break off! He's on me!>

The Blade ship of a visser.

I looked down at my display. The *StarSword* lay It swooped in close to the doomed, powerless helpless, unable to move. Yeerk Bug fighters swarmed *StarSword*. And with its Dracon beams it began to around her, firing Dracon beams at maximum

slice away the remaining two engines. The *Star-* power.

Sword would not be allowed to self-destruct. The defenses were failing. As I watched, one of

<Fighters! Any fighters, try to draw that Blade the Dome ship's engines was blown completely ship off!>

away from the ship. An explosion without sound in The captain's call went unanswered. There were the vacuum of space.

no fighters left.

The Yeerk pool ship sat like a fat spider gloating So this was the battle the Ellimist wanted me to over its kill. The *StarSword* was finished. The Yeerks join. This was where I was supposed to be. I called could finish her off at leisure.

up ship-to-ship communications. <Hang on, *Star-* But still the warriors aboard the Dome ship *Sword*. I'll take care of that Blade ship.> fought on. I heard

their thought-speak cries to the

<Who the . . . who is that?>

few remaining Andalite fighters.

<Elfangor. I mean, *Aristh* Elfangor-Sirinial<Seerian, watch out! Bug fighter on your tail!> Shamtul.>

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<What by all the bloody tails of Crangar are you mum Burn. At this distance it will take me less than doing here?>

two seconds to impact your ship.>

<It's a long story, Captain. I hope I'll have the

<You're bluffing!>

chance to tell it to you.> I switched channels to

<Ten . . . Nine . . .>

broadcast in the open. On a frequency the Yeerks

<You'd be killed as well as me.>

would monitor.

<Yes. I would. Seven . . . Six . . .> I aimed the fighter straight at the Blade ship. I

<All Dracon beams on that fighter!> Visser Three punched up a nice, medium burn. And then I called shouted to his crew.

up the Blade ship. <Andalite fighter calling the Yeerk The Blade ship turned to bring its Dracon beams visser.>

forward where they could be aimed at me.

A Hork-Bajir face appeared on the monitor.

<You don't have enough time, Visser,> I said.

"Who are you to call upon the visser? If you are

<And once I punch a Maximum Burn it'll be too pleading for mercy, I can laugh at you as well as late. Four . . . Three . . .>

he!"

His main eyes blazed hatred at me.

<Pleading for mercy? Not likely. Tell the visser

<Two . . . One . . .>

that an old friend is here to see him. Tell him that

<Get us out of here, top speed!> Visser Three Elfangor has come to finish what we began in a vorscreamed at his helmsman. tex, a long time ago.>

The Blade ship's engines glowed bright and the In a flash the screen image changed. And there ship broke away from the *StarSword*.

was the Andalite face that had once belonged to

<You think you've won, Andalite?> Visser Three War-prince Alloran.

sneered. <You're still just one fighter. And your
<You!> he cried.

Dome ship is crippled. I'll swing around, move off,

<I have to congratulate you on escaping from and finish you in my own
good time.>

that black hole. And I hear you've been promoted,

<I wouldn't swing around just yet, Visser. See, Yeerk. Visser *Three*. Very
impressive. But I have to you've cost me too much. And I am going to put an tell
you, Yeerk, I am aimed straight for your ship. end to you right now. Computer?
Maximum Burn!> And in exactly ten seconds I will punch up MaxiF W O O O O
O S H !

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My engines lit up and I was blown back across everything. I wanted
someone to know, now that the fighter's cramped bridge.

Loren no longer did.

B O O O O O M !

I told the captain everything ... except for the My fighter hit the neck of the
Blade ship, slicing location of the Time Matrix.

the diamond-shaped bridge away from the rest of W h e n I was done he l o o
k e d at me for a the ship.

long time in silence. At last he said, <You realize, But I didn't see that. The
impact knocked me out Elfangor, that this story will never become public. and
tore both the fighters' engines and its shredder You are a great hero, and our
people need heroes. completely off.

The details of your story would just confuse the I should have died.
issue.>

But I didn't.

<But, Captain, I committed mutiny against WarMinutes after I crippled the
Blade ship, the Anprince Alloran. I failed to save Arbron. And . . . and dalite
Dome ship *TailStrike* came out of Zero-space in the end, I ran away.>

less than a light year away. The Yeerks decided it He looked at me very
seriously. <Young warrior, was time to leave. Their Pool ship put a

do you think I don't know what happened to

containment field around the parts of the broken Alloran? Do you think I
don't know about the Blade ship and made for Zero-space.

Quantum virus he unleashed in the battle for the When I woke up, back
aboard the *StarSword*, I Hork-Bajir world? Alloran was my friend. When was

already a hero. The lost *aristh* who had we were young *arisths* together he was a gentle, returned mysteriously, years after disappearing, decent youngster. And funny! He loved to joke and had flown his fighter in a bold suicide mission. and play tricks.>

I had saved the *StarSword*. I was made a full

<Alloran?> I blurted without thinking. warrior. The captain himself told me that I would be

<Yes. Alloran. But war does terrible things to a prince within a couple of years.

people. Some it raises to greatness. Others it deI had plenty of time, while recovering from my stroy. You did not mutiny against Alloran. You deinjuries, to figure out what to tell the captain. I confended the beliefs he used to hold dear. You stood sidered all sorts of lies. But in the end, I told him up for the people.>

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chapter 49

It was strange. I felt like crying. But I no longer had human eyes. So I cried the way an Andalite does. Inside. In my hearts.

<As for running away to this Earth place . no one can be brave every minute of every day. No one can be brave all the time. And now you have a second chance. We need warriors like you, Elfangor. Warriors who will not forget why they are fighting. It was many years before I saw Earth again. I Will you stand by the people in this awful time? Will had fought more battles than I could count. I had you fight? Will you be their hero?>

won, and I had lost.

I guess his words should have made me feel

The war with the Yeerks dragged on and on.

good. I had wanted once to be a hero. But now I Neither side seemed able to destroy the other. I saw what it meant. I could imagine the price I would wondered sometimes if that was just the way it had have to pay. The things I might have to do. I could to be, or if the Ellimists and their unnamed feel the weight of it settling down on me like a opponents were interfering to keep the war thousand pound stone.

going forever.

<Yes, Captain,> I said. <I will fight.> Who knows?

A Zero-space rift had opened up between planet Earth and the busy centers of the galaxy. That happens sometimes. It meant that Earth, rather than being days away, was now months and months away.

Maybe it was coincidence. Or maybe it was those great powers of the galaxy, playing their games with the threads of space and time.

But finally we did return. We went to Earth because we got evidence of what I already knew: The Yeerks had targeted Earth.

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We went in the brilliant, brand-new Dome ship I broke our Andalite law and gave these children *GalaxyTree*. We came out of Zero-space and found the power to morph. See, I knew what human chilourselves outnumbered. We fought, but this time dren can do.

there was no last-minute rescue.

The Yeerks came and I told the human children The Dome was separated from the ship and

to hide. But Tobias stayed behind with me for just a plunged into Earth's sea. My brother, Aximili, a few moments. Alone.

young *aristh* as I had been, was aboard.

<Your mother ... tell me about your mother, And I, desperate enough to break my own vow, Tobias. Your family.>

took my damaged fighter down to the planet, He was surprised. Troubled. "She . . . disaplooking for the place where I had long ago peared. When I was just little. I don't know what hidden the Time Matrix.

happened. I guess she died. People say she just left because she was messed up. They said she never By the time I landed I was too weak from my got over my father. I don't know. But I know she has injuries to even think about finding the Time Mato be dead because she'd never have just left me. t r i x . I t w a s b u r i e d b e n e a t h t h e c o n c r e t e No matter what. But maybe that's just what I told foundation of a half-finished building. What had myself. I don't exactly have a family." once been peaceful forest was now a construction It was a fresh stab of pain in my hearts. And yet, site.

I knew now that all was not lost.

I lay there dying, knowing that Visser Three

<Go to your friends, Tobias. They are your famwould pursue me. Knowing that this time, at long ily now.>

last, he would win over me.

That's when I knew there was still hope for my And that's when five human children, no older adopted people, the humans of Earth. My son had than Loren had been when I first met her, came by. Three boys and two girls. Scared at the sight of me. survived. He was strong in ways even he did not But not so scared that they ran away.

suspect. He would change the course of history. One of them seemed especially drawn to me.

And oh, as I lie here now, seconds from death, And when I saw his face, I knew why.

clutched in the power of Visser Three's monstrous He could only be Loren's son. My son.

morph, I can see clearly what I only guessed at be"Hello," the one called Tobias said to me. fore.

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I remember seeing the time line that curled away from Loren and me. And I remember the burst of light as it was joined with four other human lines, and the line of my own little brother.

Tobias was that line. And joined with these others, he held powers that would make Visser Three tremble.

I, Elfangor-Sirinial-Shamtul, having transmitted all my last thoughts and memories to be sent through space to my people, now end my life.

My *hirac delest* is done. I go in peace to my death. And I leave as my last legacy a single word for all the free peoples of the galaxy.

<Hope . . .>

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